

SYNERGY

Volume 3: No.2

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment



SIN-EMA!



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SYNERGY

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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.



The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

If you require an ALL region DVD and Blu-ray player, we recommend you look at the Kogan Blu-ray player (<http://www.kogan.com.au>)

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

DD refers to Digital Download with the format of the download following in brackets.

Publication Details

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The print and digital edition of Synergy is published six times a year and includes reviews from the website from the preceding period expanded content, articles and features research, news, added images, screen shorts and competitions.

Features, articles, news and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

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The Digital Edition cannot be altered or articles used without permission, except as copyright allows. Synergy does automatic permission for companies supplying titles for review to use the given review in their own publicity as long as our details are included with every use.

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The movie posters used are believed to be within the public domain, please notify us of any corrections.



Welcome to the Sin-ema edition of Synergy.

We have decided to explore some of the more adventurous areas of cinema in this and the following issue. This issue is dedicated to Sin-ema; covering all aspects of erotica and adult film.

We should remind our readers that Synergy is for mature audiences and that some of the content in this issue will include adult and explicit descriptions.

We will have some fascinating discussions on freedom of speech and censorship as well as a look at the history of erotica.

We will also explore that fascinating world called "Fetish"; there will be lots to interest, intrigue and stimulate your jaded palates (!) including the films of David Blyth and the unique Japanese erotic film genre known as Pink or Eiga.

This is a packed issue giving erotica the coverage it deserves; too often it is simply written off as "porn" (whatever that actually means) and yet it is a genre which is diverse, challenging and fascinating.

The next issue will be on Cinematic Contraband including a full history from Nudie Cuties to Roughies, Mondo films, Dope Cinema and beyond as well as special focus articles on significant sub genres.

We think you will lots of interest in these issues, they are also packed with a wide range of reviews including coverage of a myriad weird and wonderful titles.

We always welcome your comments and feedback.

The Synergy Team





Astone Media Gear AP-110D

Astone has generously made available a Astone Media Gear AP-110D and USB wireless dongle to giveaway. This is one of the most impressive Media Centres on the market (see our review this issue) and literally turns your TV is a media and network hub. Able to link to USB storage devices, NAS, Ethernet and Wireless, it is truly impressive device.

If you would like to get a chance to win the Unit and Wireless Dongle, send an email with *Astone Media Gear* in the title to promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Emails will be collected and one will be chosen on March 10th.

The winner will be notified via email and the prize sent registered mail. Prizes cannot be exchanged for other goods or cash and this promotion is open to entries from Australia only.

Legend of Plaseebo

Bob Conge of Plaseebo has made available an amazing giveaway to Synergy readers.

We have two of the original 1st Edition Legend of Plaseebo figures.

The figure and sarcophagus is rotocast in glow in the dark vinyl. The figure is 8" long prone and comes in a vinyl Sarcophagus. It also comes with a copy of the illustrated Legend of Plaseebo story and a full colour header card.

These are beautiful (and rare) figures, not only visually arresting but quite unusual.

For a chance to win send the word *Plaseebo* to promotions@synergy-magazine.com in the subject with your name and address in the email.



We will choose two winners at random on March 10th 2010.

Prizes cannot be exchanged for other goods or cash and this promotion is open to entries worldwide.

See our article this issue on Plaseebo and the work of Bob Conge.

Haeundae

Madman Entertainment

Haeundae is a superb Korean disaster movie, balancing amazing CGI with excellent storytelling and character development.

Madman Entertainment have made available three copies for us to giveaway.



For a chance to win send the word *Haeundae* to promotions@synergy-magazine.com in the subject with your name and address in the email.

We will choose three winners at random on March 10th 2010.

For a full review see the World Cinema section of this issue. Prizes cannot be exchanged for other goods or cash and this promotion is open to entries from Australia only.

Belkin Double N + Wireless Router

Belkin's line of award-winning Wireless routers have proven to be very popular. However with the advent of the Double N+ Router they have created a new standard of excellence. It features a dual IEEE 802.11n system operating on the 2.4GHz and 5GHz frequencies to ensure "a faster and more reliable connection".

We tested this system and found it incredibly reliable, allowing users to connect to different frequencies according to their needs. We found the 2.4 best for general web surfing and 5 amazing for multimedia streaming.

The router includes four Gigabit Ethernet ports, which is certainly generous. There is also a USB port for network attached storage. When this is activated it can work as a server for sharing media and can run a bit-torrent system even when your computer is turned off, downloading direct to your attached storage.

The media server automatically scans folders on the attached USB drive for new media which can then easily be accessed by media players such as Xbox 360 and the PS3 as well as the wide range of media servers now on the market. QoS is automatic and prioritizes time-sensitive data like VoIP phone calls, streaming video, and online gaming ahead of less-sensitive activities.

The router has a good aesthetic, two aerials and an LED speedometer that indicates the download speed of your network.

The Green Networking approach taken by Belkin is also admirable. The Double N+ Router uses Green Ethernet Ports to reduce energy usage compared to standard Ethernet Ports.

This innovative energy-saving technology automatically detects connectivity status and cable length, and then adjusts power accordingly. The router also features Wi-Fi scheduling that allows users to easily program when the Wi-Fi radio signals are turned on and off to further save energy consumption.

There is also push button security. You can simply create a secure wireless connection with the push of a button by using WPS.

Installation is a dream. I was surprised how easy it was to use. In the past it has been troublesome to bridge modems and routers, not



with this little wonder. Using a simple installation you are lead stage by stage through the process until your information is installation on the Belkin and you are up and running.

It includes various form of security and so you are safe and secure as well. Of course for the experienced a manual interface is also available, but even for the novice with little to no tech experience, installation will be a breeze.

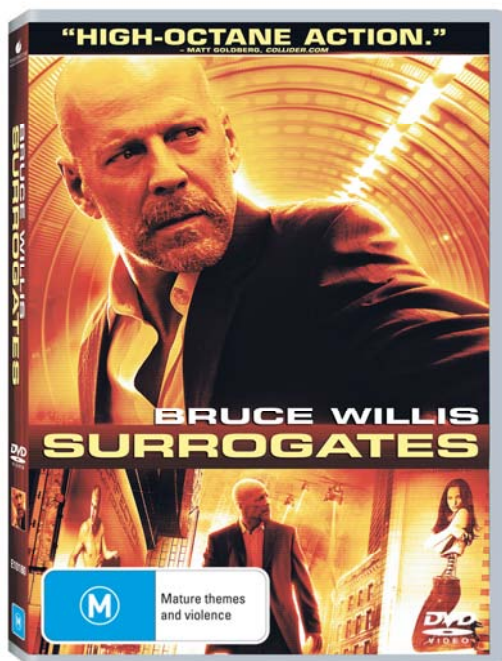
Belkin Double N + Wireless Router Giveaway

Belkin has offered us one of these marvels to giveaway. Australian Entries Only Please.

Simple send an email with Belkin Double N + Wireless Router in the subject and your name, & email address in the body of the message to: promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Prizes cannot be exchanged for other goods or cash and no corresponded will be entered into.

We will choose a winner at random on March 25th 2010 and notify them by email.



Look at yourselves. Unplug from your chairs, get up and look in the mirror. What you see is how God made you. We're not meant to experience the world through a machine.

The Prophet

In the not too distant future robotic technology has taken an unusual turn. Mankind stays at home while operating robotic surrogates embedded with their signature to live in the outside world. This solution is seen as a way to not only reduce crime but to deal with complex social issues as the surrogates may or may not resemble their owners at all.

There are groups of people who do not especially like this development and they live within reserves where they can live without the need of surrogates. Chief among the dissenters is The Prophet who rails against this new and what he sees as dehumanizing technology.

When the surrogates of a man and a woman are destroyed by a sophisticated weapon which simultaneously kills its owners, FBI Agents Greer and Peters are assigned to the case and uncover a conspiracy that reaches to the very heart of the surrogate technology itself.

Surrogates is directed by Jonathan Mostow, who directed *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and recently created *The Megs*, a four-issue graphic novel series for Virgin Comics.



Surrogates will be released on both DVD and Blu-ray/DVD Combo pack on March 3rd 2010.

The *Surrogates* Blu-ray contains the DVD extras plus exclusive bonus features that go into the heart of the film's intriguing premise: *A More Perfect You: The Science of Surrogates*, *Breaking the Frame: A Graphic Novel Comes to Life*, and Four Deleted Scenes.

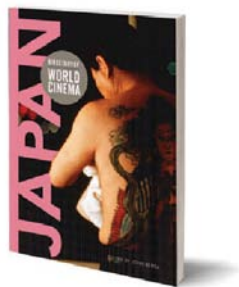
Thanks to Disney Studios we have some special giveaways available. These include windcheaters and notepads. Email the word *Surrogates* to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with your full name and email address in the body of the message.

We will draw entries at random on 10th March. Winners will be contacted by email and prizes sent via registered mail.



The Directory of World Cinema: Japan

Intellect is delighted to announce the launch of the Directory of World Cinema: Japan, which you can download for free from the website.



From the revered classics of Akira Kurosawa to the modern marvels of Takeshi Kitano, the films that have emerged from Japan represent a national cinema that has gained worldwide admiration and appreciation.

The Directory of World Cinema: Japan provides an insight into the cinema of Japan through reviews of significant titles and case studies of leading directors, alongside explorations of the cultural and industrial origins of key genres. The cinematic lineage of samurai warriors, yakuza enforcers and atomic monsters take their place alongside the politically charged works of the Japanese new wave, making this a truly unique volume.

The ethos of Intellect's Directory of World Cinema as a project is probably best communicated by John Berra's editorial taken from the Japanese volume, where he comments:

"This was never intended to be a conventional film guide, as the overall aim was always to discuss Japanese cultural life and history as expressed through the medium of film."

The Directory of World Cinema aims to play a part in moving intelligent, scholarly criticism beyond the academy by building a forum for the study of film that relies on a disciplined theoretical base. Each volume of the Directory will take the form of a collection of reviews, longer essays and research resources, accompanied by film stills highlighting significant films and players.

The project consists of three components:

- * A pre-print web-based database, which will facilitate content collection and provide free access to the content.
- * A series of printed volumes for each world region, of about 300 pages per volume.
- * Post-publication online PDFs of the published material, sold to libraries.

To find out more about the Directory of World Cinema please visit the official website: <http://www.worldcinemadirectory.org/>



The Black Devil Doll SOUNDBOARD is LIVE!

An outrageous soundboard created from the movie Black Devil Doll is now online. Visit <http://www.blackdevildoll.com>



Pink Eiga S & M Hunter

Pink Eiga has decided to revamp the cover of S & M Hunter for its re-release and invited Robin Bougie of Cinema Sewer to design it and JB3 of Say Uncle Comics to colour it. It is certainly an eye catching piece of work and will grab attention wherever it is seen.

Web: <http://www.pinkeiga.com>

Coming Soon from Christopher R. Mihm Destination: Outer Space

During a test flight of Earth's first faster-than-light-speed rocket, an incident occurs that throws test pilot Captain Mike Jackson (originally introduced in 2008's "Cave Women on Mars") halfway across the galaxy! Lost in deep space, Captain Jackson must use all his wits and derring-do to find a way back to his beloved home world. A film unlike any other, "Destination: Outer Space" is full of excitement and otherworldly adventure that includes mysterious alien planets, robotic life forms, beautiful space pirates, alien creatures hell-bent on galactic domination and much, much more!

Web: <http://www.sainteuphoria.com/dos.html>

Film Matters

Film Matters is the first international undergraduate, peer-reviewed film journal, offering students from around the world an unmatched opportunity to showcase their academic talent.



Published four times a year, each issue will contain feature articles, as well as a robust film and book review section.

This innovative and timely publication will appeal to a vast community of international film scholars, as potential contributors and readers. The journal will enable unparalleled access to professional academic publishing opportunities for undergraduates, and will exhibit cutting-edge research from outstanding future film scholars worldwide.

Film Matters is published by Intellect in partnership with the Department of Film Studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Film Matters benefits from Intellect's international publishing heritage in film studies, with publications including Film International, The Big Picture and the Directory of World Cinema.

The journal acknowledges the graphic power of cinema, and encourages visual literacy of film through its elegant design and rich layout. With both open and imaginative themed issues such as women in cinema, and films and social change, the journal will push film studies forward in new and original directions.

'Film Matters is a unique global venture, offering publishing opportunities for a new, younger generation of film scholars. Film Matters reflects the dynamic culture of film studies internationally, and will provide fresh perspectives on canonical works, and original insights into films and filmmakers too long ignored.'

Dr. Lou Buttino, Chair of Film Studies Dept., UNC Wilmington.

Explore the first issue free online at:

Web: <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=1777/>

More Australian Censorship

"Any pretense from the Australian Government that its proposed internet filter will not extend to millions of sites has died with news that the Government has banned small breasts and female ejaculation in adult material. The ban (RC) on small breasted women in adult publications has been made by the Australian Classification Board allegedly on the grounds that such images could be construed as child pornography, even where those publications comply with American law and keep certification that performers are over 18.

Female ejaculation has been banned on the incredible grounds that "the depictions are a form of urination which is banned under the label of 'golden showers' in the Classification Guidelines" and/or "Female ejaculation is an 'abhorrent' depiction." Notably here male ejaculation is completely legal under the same guidelines, attracting an X rating in Australia.

The Australian Sex Party argues that "There are over one million sites featuring female ejaculation and for Australia to be banning depictions and discussion of this important issue, takes us back into the Victorian era where they didn't even believe that women could have orgasms."

Millions though doesn't start to get close to the number of sites that could potentially be banned with this change. Under Australian law, any site linking to a site that has been refused classification is also refused classification, so something as simple as a series of swapped links on a porn site which shows neither small breasts or female ejaculation would be banned. Then if it's a general site with one small breasted performer, out comes the ban hammer as well, and that takes us to tens of millions of adult sites.

Web: <http://www.inquisitr.com/>



Democracy, Free Speech and Cinema



Central to the imposition of censorship and its relation to cinema and entertainment is the significance of free speech. One of the problems with the notion of free speech is most people do not really understand what it's nature, its limitations and its importance within a true democracy. Too often people claim a belief in freedom of speech yet when confronted with something that offends them are the first to write letters or complain to their local TV station. Freedom of speech, by necessity, must include the right to offend and a defence of things which many would consider "bad taste".

To believe freedom of speech only applies to things which we believe we have the right to express and to deny the same privilege to others is the height of hypocrisy. While freedom of speech surely has its limitations, and we will discuss these below, these limitations cannot include protection against offense. The logic behind this is, to my mind, fairly obvious: anyone can take offense at anything. If we attempt to use legislation to protect against offense then quickly all entertainment will be reduced to a blandness never previously experienced as material which could offend literally anybody would have to be removed. Since we live in a society which is diverse and multi-cultural, filled to the brim with different races, cultures and ways of thinking, it would be literally impossible to create *viable* entertainment which offends no-one unless it was of the very lowest common denominator.

I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

Voltaire

The question that arises when discussing freedom of speech is what is its foundation? Following on from this, we need to ask exactly what is the keystone to democracy and why is freedom of speech so significant. This is a highly important question; there are many forms of de-

mocracy around the world, some have a religious bias, others are manipulated by the military, so we need to consider what should be the keystone of a true democracy leading into the future. It is only from this that we can then discuss issues relating to freedom of speech.

If a democracy is truly to represent a vast range of diverse individuals, races and cultures then it needs to be broad based; it must be founded on what people have in common not their differences. If we consider what is common among vast numbers of people, we would come to the conclusion that it is their "shared humanity", that all races are essentially "ethical animals" or "animals with consciousness". Accordingly the foundation of a truly diverse democracy must, by necessity, be secular and use *evidence based legislation*. It could be debated whether this discussion is relevant to issues relating to censorship, however if we do not define the basis of our worldview then we do not have common ground on which we can discuss issues relating to freedom of speech and censorship.

Many may argue that religious views similarly promote respect of human rights, however, if we look closely at the world's religions we find that each has a different view of rights based on their own unique understanding of the human condition.

The significance of the scientific and rationalist perspective becomes more obvious when we



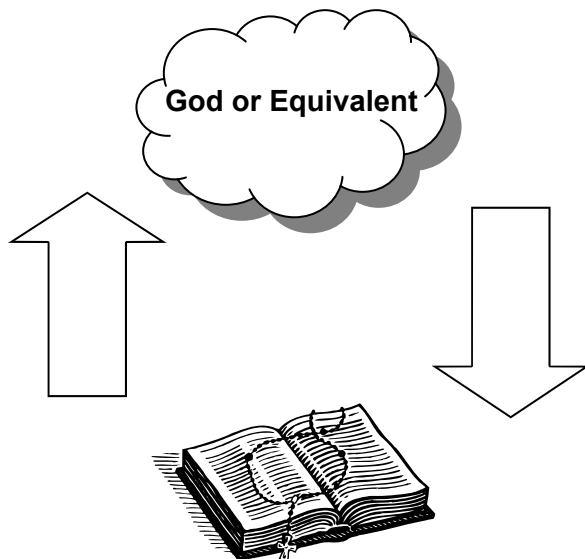


Fig 1. Closed System: Circular Thinking Religious

compare the “knowledge systems” of religion, ideological systems such as Marxism and science. The knowledge systems of all religions (Fig 1) are closed knowledge systems, circular in nature and self referencing.

If we look at the primary monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), their knowledge systems are based on their respective sacred texts through which God communicates. These systems are self-referencing in that they confirm the sacredness of the text through God have communicated them and confirm the existence of God through the sacred text. (Fig 1).

These systems are closed systems and while occasional accommodations may be made to beliefs (such as the slow acceptance of the world circulating the sun), truth is seen as static and revealed in the given scripture. New Age and Buddhist traditions are not that much different, they simply replace God with an enlightened being or an “Inner Self” and replace the key text with a text of their choosing. In Buddhism for example, truth is found in the Dharma because it was revealed by the Buddha who was a self realized being. How do we know he was self realized ? Because the Dharma tells us so !

Ideological systems such as fascism or Marxism (Fig 2) are actually closer to being religious systems that most would care to admit. They have the same closed knowledge system using a text or political belief as the sole arbitrator of truth to define the society with the government of whatever type as the decoder and enforcer of that

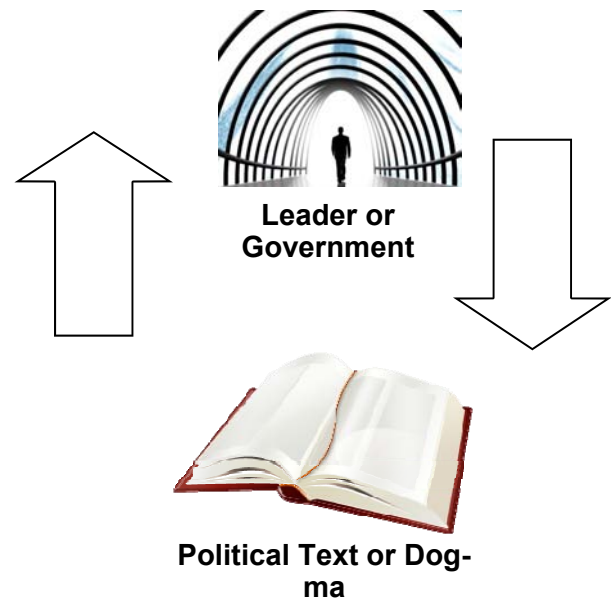


Fig 2. Closed System: Circular Thinking Politics

truth. Many of these systems (such as North Korea) develop quasi religious iconography and political forms since the closed nature of their knowledge system has much in common with a religious system, even to the degree of turning their founder or leaders into figures of awe. (Fig 2)

The scientific model is totally different (Fig 3), it is based on experimentation and on verification via a peer process. It is dynamic and while inately cautious always allows room for error correction and new discoveries. While science certainly may experience errors and mistakes

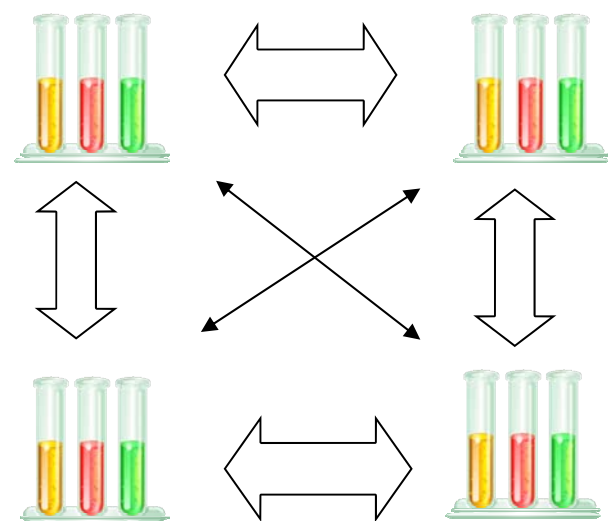


Fig 2. Dynamic System: Science Experimentation and Peer Review

(scientists are only human), these are usually uncovered and corrected. This system while certainly not perfect (one can argue the human cost in medication or surgical mistakes etc.) is certainly far preferable to the nightmarish cost in human lives brought about the knowledge systems of religion or extreme ideology. One only has to compare religious inquisitions, crusades, inter-religious feuds, terrorism, as well as ideological extremism (Nazi, Soviet and Fascist) with scientific errors across history to observe the difference. Using this scientific foundation we can then consider what should be the basic shared human rights within a democracy.

The foundation of freedom should be the *sovereignty of the individual*. An individual should be safe from violence (or crime) by individuals or collectives and be able to live the way they choose unless it directly effects the sovereignty of other individuals.

Extended from this we would argue that an individual has the right not to be defamed (i.e. the focus of misinformation) or vilified. Vilification should also apply collectively as well as individually.

The word vilification is bandied about a lot these days and at times used by pressure groups to demand censorship materials they deem to be offensive or bad taste. Vilification within a secular democracy would be understood as the use of media to encourage violence against an individual or minority. It would also include the deliberate use of misinformation to encourage violence against a minority. For example, to make jokes about gays is bad taste but is not vilification, to suggest all homosexuals have AIDS and should be quarantined or worse, is. To dress up in black face is extremely bad taste but is not vilification, but to suggest all coloured people should be segregated or that all blacks are criminals is clearly vilification.

There is an immense danger today that vilification legislation is being manipulated by pressure groups to stop content they consider bad taste and offensive but clearly this is not the role of a government. A government is not the arbiter of taste, its role is the protection of the individual and the two should not be confused. Political Correctness, sadly, has created a culture where laws which



should be used to protect minorities from violence are being distorted to stop all manner of "questionable" content and this creates an environment when literally anything can be censored if someone complains.

One of the things I have clearly left out in the above discussion is freedom of religion. From a scientific perspective we can argue that the sovereignty of the individual includes protection from vilification on the basis of race, gender, disability and sexual orientation since these things clearly have a primary genetic component and have a basis in fact.

Religion is a set of beliefs which really has no more significance than any other form of literature, speech or idea. To suggest that religion should somehow have a special status is to suggest that a series of ideas for which there is no scientific foundation should be favoured and that is clearly ridiculous. It also creates an immense conflict at the heart of any discussion of human rights since every religion disagrees with the others !

And this does not take into account the disagreements between sects and traditions within a given faith.





Christians claim they are vilified by media that ridicules their values and beliefs but are happy to vilify others, ranging from sexual minorities to competing religions and even sects they dislike within their own faith.

While Jews, Moslems and Christians being monotheists will generally agree to respect each other, they will all heap abuse on minority religions such as pagans, polytheists and so on.

In the end such a system becomes totally unworkable with each faith vilifying its competition. It is patently obvious that to offer any protection for ideas just because they are religious is plain ridiculous. Indeed I would hope that in a secular democracy all special recognition (such as tax exemption etc.) would be removed from religious institutions and the special respect given to them by the media curtailed.

Just because a group of people have a shared delusion which has continued for thousands of years without evidence doesn't make it significant or right.

If we give *any* religion special rights then *every* sect, cult and religion can claim the same privilege and we end up with a system where clearly delusional beliefs (such as faith healing, rejection of medicine on religious grounds and so on) are protected by so-called freedom of religion legislation.

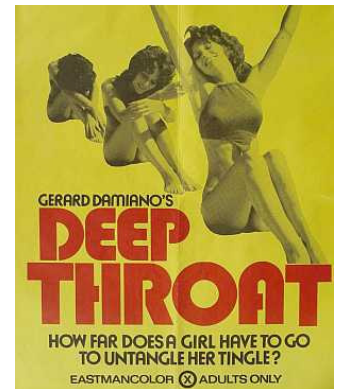
Once we remove any special consideration of religion, then we can use our rationalist model to begin to consider how we should approach freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech should really be called "*The Rights and Responsibilities of Freedom of*

Speech" since clearly speech, literature, film and so on all has consequences. In a free society indirect consequences (such as offense) are irrelevant, however, vilification of a minority clearly is significant and should be unacceptable. For example, *The Eternal Jew* (1940), a Nazi propaganda film would be considered vilification since it sets out to defame and encourage violence against a minority. Accordingly it would be restrictedly classified and only allowed for distribution for educational purpose.



If we focus our consideration on film, a free society would allow any X rated content (sex or violence) as long as it is clearly and honestly classified. The restriction on this would clearly be based on any possible infringement on the sovereignty of the individual i.e. consent. Accordingly films using underage actors or those who cannot consent would be considered unacceptable.



Beyond these restrictions there should be no issue with the distribution of adult titles (sex or fetish) while advertising would be kept out of the view of minors due to general social custom.

The key issue that arises with adult films is the perception by wowsers and puritans that they are somehow different from general cinema. The reality is that adult cinema is made in a way that is very little different from mainstream cinema except the activities shown involve sex. If John Hurt plays a hit man in a film we have no trouble appreciating the fact that he is playing a role and is not a hit man in real



life. However when someone gets hit with a load of cum (half of which is probably cornflour anyway) in a film, we somehow become convinced it is “real” and that the actor or actress is promiscuous in real life.

Adult cinema employs actors and actresses just like any other cinema and no differentiation can really be made between the two types of film. If you were to examine how an adult film is made with constant “stops and starts” for static shots, positions held to change camera angle and so on you would realize there is no “natural” about making an adult film and it is as artificial as any work of cinema.

A classic example in adult cinema is the “gay for pay” phenomenon where young men, discovering they can make more money in gay adult cinema, perform in gay films even though they consider themselves heterosexual. Regardless of the debates about the psychology of such choices, the reality is that these actors see themselves as straight and play a gay role in adult cinema and this really cannot be considered any different than an actor playing a role in traditional cinema.



This approach should be clearly extended to computer games with a rating system allowing adult content. The only caveat I would consider would be an examination of the way in which many unscrupulous game manufacturers (those who make massive multi player online games especially) use micro reward systems developed by psychologists to entrap players. However with all media there is the ultimate human right, which most commentators ignore, the right to not buy the product or to turn off the program. In so many ways individuals must take responsibility for what they watch and decide what to consume.

This second issue brings up a fascinating further development within a rationalist approach to freedom of speech and censorship. In a secular democracy clearly restraints on fiction, film and magazines would be relaxed and free expression would be encouraged, however, at the same time the issue of responsibility in relation to media would also be brought into focus.

Clearly a rationalist approach would demand more accuracy in classification. Books and products of a religious and new age nature would need to be labelled “speculative” and not considered nonfiction in the same vein as an historical or scientific item. Documentaries and films with new age and religious content would have their own classification. Since we now have a “supernatural themes” category on Australian films, we should have one for “spiritual themes”. Advertising would be more heavily scrutinized and the “truth in media” encouraged.

An evidence based approach to freedom of speech and expression would change our society in so many ways not only allowing a more open exploration of cinema and literature but curtailing the excesses of the irrational.

The TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration), for example, could be expanded to review new age goods, vitamins, diet pills and other dubious items and unless they can fulfil the same standards required for pharmaceuticals they would be banned from the market.

It is insane to talk of alternative or complimentary medicine when one side has the highest standards of testing costing millions of dollars and the other just whacks on a label and starts making unproven claims accompanied with new age mumbo jumbo.

While this article has explored many different subjects I believe they are all interconnected. To fully appreciate the role censorship plays in the modern world and the need for freedom of speech and expression, we need to come to an understanding of the ideology which underlies so many decisions by so called democratic governments.



In a world which is religiously conflicted, plagued by terrorism and saturated with irrational forms of new age health practise and superstitions the only way forward is a secular form of democracy with ethics based on rational evidence based thinking. It is also only in this world that I believe we will ultimately only truly have the rights and responsibilities to use freedom of speech and expression wisely.



Fetish: Whatever Turns You On !

I'm into flagellation, necrophilia and bestiality – am I flogging a dead horse?

I like the Google definition of a fetish: “a form of sexual desire in which gratification depends to an abnormal degree on some object or item of clothing or part of the body”.

There's the dilemma – we are supposed to disapprove of such “goings-on” but since so many people enjoy it, it features in a surprisingly large number of films within general cinema and adult film.

Since fetish is often only accompanied by mild sexual activity (and in some cases none at all) to classify it with explicit adult cinema is a misrepresentation of the genre. A well-made fetish film will simply explore an area where people gain pleasure by a different means to conventional sex. If you don't find a specific form of fetish film titillating then clearly that fetish is not for you. It is all of a matter of personal taste. Fetish films are by necessity niche market films. In this they are unlike conventional adult titles that attempt to glamorise sex simply for money and reduce it to a simple formula of in and out.

The dividing line between fetish and adult film is blurred. Leaving out the wowsers who find any depiction of people enjoying themselves sinful, many people dislike fetish because it makes them uncomfortable (pun not intended). Although a particular fetish may not be your cup of tea, somewhere in the world it is probably a common cultural practice. Filming such practices goes back a very long way, first as a form of documentary filmmaking and then as a form of



Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman

entertainment cinema. Many practices become classified as a “fetish” only when taken out of their cultural environment or social context.

Fashion

As an example, let's briefly trace the changing emphasis on women's revealing clothing. Throughout the ages various parts of a woman's body have triggered sexual attraction depending on culture and social custom. In those wonderful period films from France and England it was appropriate to thrust out your bosom and expose as much of it as possible (at least, if you were a woman – if you were a man then the codpiece or tight pantaloons were for you). If you had the breasts to handle this without costume malfunctions then your social success was assured because this form of exhibitionism was a fetish of the times. Of course, everything else was covered up – we wouldn't want to ap-



Emma Peel and Uma Thurman

pear indecent, would we? This raises a valid point. Often Fashion is just Fetish put on display.

In Europe women realised that dragging expensive cloth through the dirt was really silly and dress hems started to rise. In most other cultures they had realised this centuries before and modified their clothing according to local climate and material supply. As a result a bare-breasted maiden in a grass skirt just didn't have the same arousal factor on the local natives that it had on visiting seamen. In Hawaii it wasn't a fetish, just sensible dress for the climate. The rising hemlines began the fetish of ankle worship, but it lost out through the Victorian period when exposing anything at all was bound to inflame passions and inspire lust, apparently. (This leg and ankle fetish returned around World War II for a brief reappearance. Have a look at the nose art on American bombers for some good examples).

The erotic power of the behind could be suggested through that truly lunatic invention, the bustle. This swathed a lady's bottom in large amounts of cloth, hoops, whalebone and other hardware so your bum stuck out at the back. I can't imagine what was erotic about this, but apparently the men of the time found it irresistible. It must have been hard for women to get away from them through narrow doorways.

During the 1920s dresses became more minimal as the era of the flapper took over. The far more liberating dresses attracted the adverse attention of wowsers but really, nobody cared about their opinion any more. Since then hemlines have gone up and down like a bride's nightie and necklines have plunged to try to meet them. The rising hemline culminated in the miniskirt of the Swinging Sixties where it

appeared in many films. The fetish areas have changed from ankles to legs to breasts to bottoms and back again. Clothing styles no longer really have the status of a fetish – that's what womens' fashions really were about - but are just a regularly changing marketing exercise. There is one exception that has kept a strong fetish element – leather. Who watched the British show *The Avengers* and was not even slightly turned on by Emma Peel wearing a cow's outside layer?

Fetish in Modern Cinema

This can be divided into three major categories:

Unusual and bizarre clothing that would be inappropriate for street use (studded leather, exaggerated shoes, latex, PVC, submission gear).

Physical Fetish - actions that can be done to a human body (torture, piercing, flogging, humiliation) that may or may not have a direct sexual element but are of fetishistic interest.

Fantasy situations acted out for the camera. Examples can include erotic wrestling films, domination and submission, giant films (where supertall woman are photographed stamping on bugs)(huh???) and furies (where people dress as real and fantasy animals).

We will avoid the fringe areas like bestiality.

Clothing

Clothing as fetish now tends to be less important as interest turns to other practices. Many of these areas are now being depicted in modern film. This does not necessarily signify a wider public acceptance (although I believe it does) but perhaps it reflects a better understanding of the fact that these are just paid actors and actresses doing a job. If they do it so well that it gives you a bit of a fantasy turn on, so be it. Breasts and bottoms and what you do with them don't make a film pornographic, just more entertaining.

A strong mainstream fetish film in the first category was the 1989 remake of *Batman*. Batman's latex suit was, shall we say, fully detailed. Batman's rubberised nipples attracted almost as much attention as the rest of the film. One of our staff wants to know why Batgirl's suit didn't get the same treatment. Leather fans got their chance in *Batman Returns*, where Michelle Pfeiffer's leather Catwoman suit stole the show from a fetish perspective. Uma Thurman looked



The Fetishism of Batman

particularly sexy in her leather outfits in *Kill Bill*.

The ritualised style of BDSM also brings with it distinctive styles of clothing and accessories, many of which have developed into what could be best defined as erotic fashion.

Leather has developed a cult of its own with all manner of accessories being used as Bondage Gear. Bondage is the experience of being tied up or restrained for pleasure. The leatherwear is often minimalist and involves studs, buckles, etc. It will often be used as part of a humiliation fetish ritual. I have a friend who makes stockwhips. Cracking a whip over a bovine is not usually regarded as kinky but he is often asked to make a "speciality" whip. It will be made from softer leather and won't have the "popper" on the end that makes a stockwhip crack, so we're not fooling anyone about its intended use, are we?



Al Pacino in *Cruising*



The Satanic Sluts

Leather within the gay culture has become a fetish area in itself with its own customs and sexual practice. This was used as the backdrop for the controversial crime film *Cruising* (1980) directed by William Friedkin and starring Al Pacino. Pacino enters the world of the gay leather sub culture in search of a serial killer.

Outside the gay community there is a whole world of leather, PVC and latex which as a fetish has created its own erotic sub-culture. An excellent gateway is found in *Satanic Sluts*, a group of woman who explore the genre and have released various fetish DVDs via Redemption films. <http://www.satanic-sluts.com/>

Leather and rubber (latex) clothing has also defined new designs of street wear, usually worn a little tighter than usual to show off the body form. This was explored in Nick Phillips' 2003 film *Fraulein Leather*. It also featured in many gay and motorcycle films such as the early works of Kenneth Anger like *Fireworks* (1947) and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1964).

There are many documentaries covering BDSM and fetishes in general and these offer an excellent introduction to the field. These include



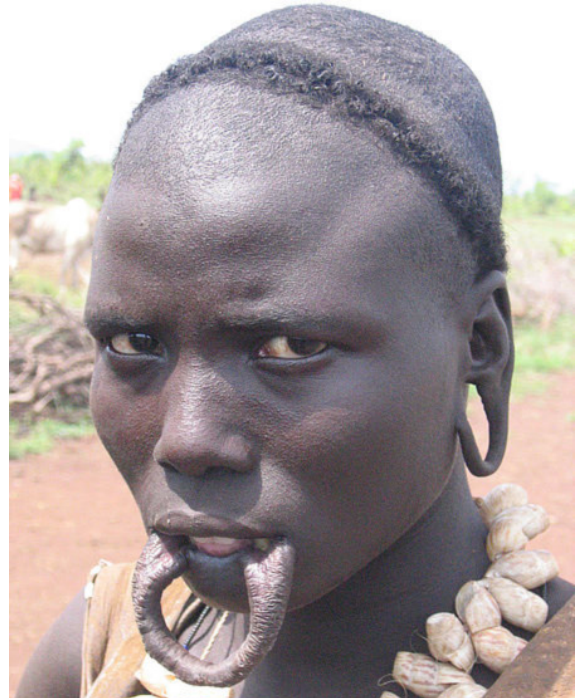
the New Zealand films *Bound for Pleasure* (David Blythe 2008) and *Transfigured Nights* (2007, also directed by David Blythe). See the feature on David in this issue. Others are *Head-space* (2002) and *Beyond Vanilla* (2001). The 1994 film *Exit To Eden* is a more light-hearted look at this fetish. A notable feminist lesbian bondage film is Monika Treut's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985).

Physical Fetish

In the second category we should have a quick look at fetishes in different cultures. Some of these have crossed over into Western culture and are now so ingrained that they have become euphemisms for particular types of sex, deserved or not. In many Middle Eastern countries anal sex is simply a means of birth control, although it has now been christened "Greek". Urinating (and worse) over a victim ("Golden Shower") is regarded as a peculiarly German fetish. Oral sex is "French". Spanking is "British", and so on.

Incidentally, regarding spanking, in the 28 March 2009 issue of *New Scientist* there is a brief review of research into S&M activities like spanking, bondage and flogging. The results suggest that if the activity is consensual the participants may experience a high rise in testosterone levels followed by "increases in sexual closeness". (Archives of Sexual Behaviour, DOI: 10.1007/s10508-008-9374-5). "*When sexual intercourse is consensual it is not stressful – even if it is extreme sex*" states one researcher (how do you get a job like that?)

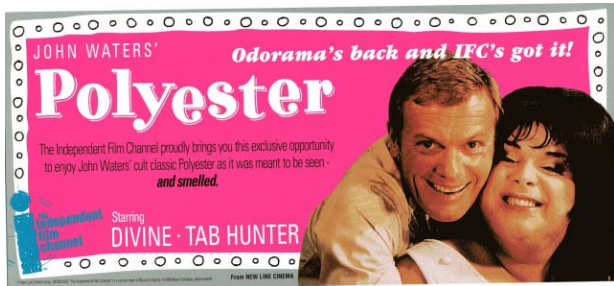
In some Pacific island countries an obese woman is a fertility fetish. In some African tribes a large protruding bottom is erotic. Body mutilation fetishes are strong around the world – some of the Karen tribes of Myanmar still use rings to stretch the necks of girls to ridiculous levels despite the risk of serious injury. Tattooing was and still is a major fetish worldwide.



Foot binding to produce tiny deformed feet in Chinese girls was practised widely until this fetish was banned by the government some decades ago. With some African tribes the woman's lower lip is stretched by wooden plates and the ears may be similarly stretched. In Western countries like the U.S. and Australia piercings can be applied to almost any part of the body – ears, eyebrows, lips, tongue, nipples, navel and so on – and such piercings are now often seen in mainstream films. A recent fetish among men is to have beads inserted under the skin to form patterns. This is reminiscent of the cicatrice scarring rituals still practiced by some tribes today. As for the Prince Albert piercing, look it up for yourself.

A significant issue is the difference between fetish and deviation. In the early days of modern psychiatry the more blatant fetishes were generally classified as sexual deviation and treated as a form of mental disturbance. Since the sex-





ual revolution of the Sixties this has slowly changed and consensual use of fetish has become accepted as part of the wide spectrum of human sexual behaviour. The dividing line between fetish and deviation tends to focus on the level of compulsion and some socially defined norms.

Exploring Sado-Masochism in the privacy of your own relationship is one thing, being a sadist 24 hours a day is another. Having a desire to stomp on women's feet (as in *Polyester* (1981) John Waters) is one thing, when Dexter becomes the Baltimore foot stomper it is another. (Our Editor suggested these – I'm really worried about him).

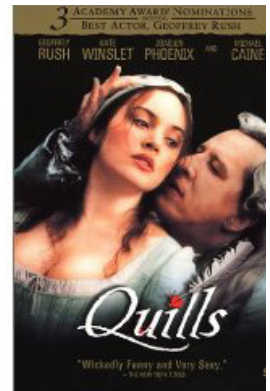
The difference between fetish and deviation is often blurred in cinema because cinema is essentially fantasy. This is something that is generally lost on those who criticise adult cinema. All cinema involves actors playing a role, whether it is being a hitman in a crime film, a parent in a family drama or participating in sexual activity in an adult film.

The terms Sadism and Masochism came from two interesting individuals, the Marquis De Sade (June 1740 – December 1814) and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (January 1836 – March 1895). De Sade was a fascinating character obsessed with pain and suffering (hence the term Sadism). It is difficult to decipher his life and decide whether he actually committed any crimes or was simply imprisoned in an insane asylum for the political and anti religious views that he mixed throughout his erotic novels. His novels, including *Justine* and *120 Days of Sodom*, are confronting and powerful works of fetishistic and erotic fiction and are also marked by their intelligence and erudition.

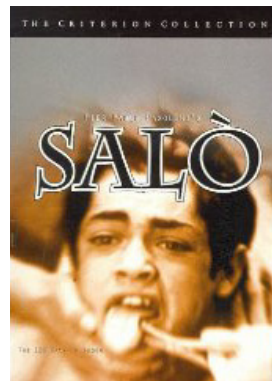


In cinema De Sade has proved a topic of great

interest. Classic films of his works include *Quills* (2000) with Geoffrey Rush as a masterful De Sade and *Sade* (2000) directed by Benoît Jacquot. It is interesting to note the different perspectives taken about his life. In *Quills*, he is portrayed as a literary freedom fighter who is an early martyr to the cause of free speech.

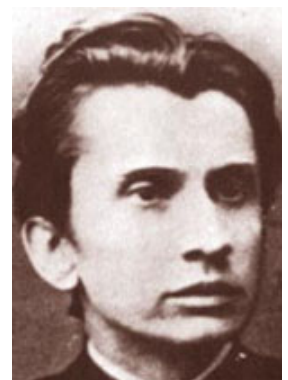


His work has also provided rich pickings for erotic cinema. Pasolini adapted his *120 Days of Sodom* into the explosive (and, in Australia, still banned) *Salò* (1975). *Justine* has been adapted multiple times in films from many countries. Some interesting versions include *Marquis de Sade: Justine* (1969) d. Jess Franco, *Justine de Sade* (1972), d. Claude Pierson, *Justine: Cruel Passion* (1977) d. Chris Boger and *Headspace* (2003), aka *Justine*, d. Mia Olin.



The image of the sadist has saturated all manner of cinema, from the iconic image of the sadistic killer to the female dominate of such exploitation classics as the *Ilsa Series*, where Ilsa works her way through a bevy of men using sex, torture, flagellation and lots more.

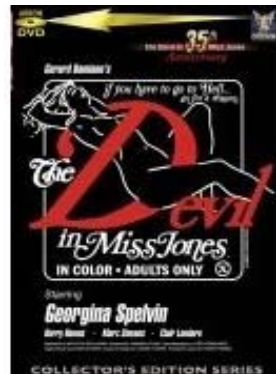
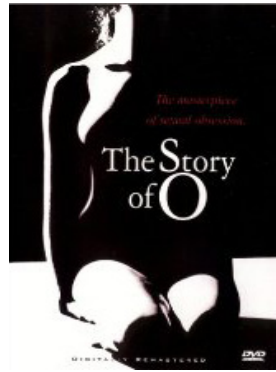
Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (January 1836 – March 1895) is considered the father of masochism and while he produced titles in many fields, his novel *Venus in Furs* is his only book available in English and is the epitome of male submissive fiction.



While theoretically separate, Sadism and Masochism usually work in tandem and are shown that way throughout cinema.

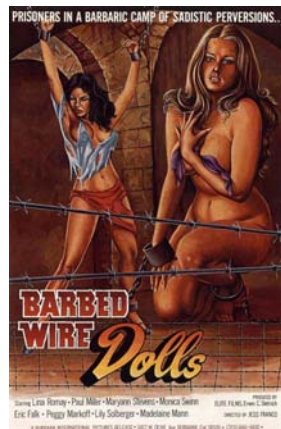
One of the classic works is *The Story of O*

(1975) based on an erotic novel published in 1954 by French author Anne Desclos under the pen name Pauline Réage. A startling film exploring all manner of fetishes including whipping, bondage and submission, it was and is quite a controversial work. Gerard Damiano, well-known for *Deep Throat* (1972) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973) created the movie *The Story of Joanna* which was heavily influenced by *The Story of O*.



The author of *The Story of O* only revealed her identity four years before her death and is the subject of a fascinating documentary *Writer of O* (2004) by Pola Rapaport.

In modern cinema S & M has been especially popular within the exploitation genres, notably within Women in Prison films.



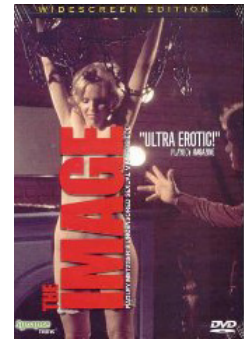
These include *Barb Wire Dolls* (1976), *Caged Heat* (1974), Roger Corman's *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *Violence In A Woman's Prison* (1975).

A further sub genre is Nazisploitation where Nazi Germany is used as a background to explore all manner of excess. Classic examples include *Ilsa: She Wolf of the S.S.* (1974) and *Love Camp 7* (1977), among many others.



Other relevant films include *The Image* (1976) directed by Radley Metzger which is also known as *The Punishment of Anne*. Based on

an infamous French best-seller this movie depicts a love triangle between a mature woman, her submissive young girl friend and a curious author. It includes graphic sex, humiliation, degradation, bondage, whipping and golden showers.



Fantasy

In the third group, one style of fetish worth mentioning is the strange attitude the Japanese have to the depiction of sex in their films. Until fairly recently any depiction of female genitals was banned. Their way around this was the odd manga / anime combination where Cat People became the victims of various sexual and fetish deviancies.



Give them a tail and pussycat ears on an otherwise human body and they were no longer human so it was OK to treat them as fetish objects. One of the more unusual comedy horrors is *Splatter Disco* (Shock-O-Rama Cinema 2007) which is a horror sex comedy with furies !

Many cartoon film stars are also depicted by fan fetishists in a more sexual role. There is also the schoolgirl fetish – not the U.S. fetish of the mature “naughty schoolgirl” that seems to be popular, but the Japanese equivalent where young schoolgirls are depicted as the protagonists in many dodgy films. This seems to be re-



Scene from *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend*

garded as perfectly natural in Japan's anime genre, as is the "tentacle rape" fetish where young girls are molested by multi-tentacled monsters. A classic example being in the Hentai Overfiend series: *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* (and sequels).



These examples reinforce the point made earlier – it's only a kinky fetish outside its natural environment. Often the fetish crosses over into Western film and becomes perfectly acceptable – does anyone still regard earrings as a piercing fetish? Is the placing of a wedding ring on a bride's finger still a sign of domination and ownership by her husband?

Now some specific examples. Try these if you wish.

The shoe fetish is also known as Retifism after Nicholas-Edme Retif, a novelist who included the shoe fetish in his writings. The most common style of fetish is impractically high heels but many other styles exist, especially in boots.

Rhabdophilia is a preference for being beaten by a rod, whip or other instrument of punishment. Mastigophilia is the general liking of having pain inflicted on you or watching pain being inflicted on others. Does this include Wile E. Coyote cartoons? If so, does this mean that our kids are all a bunch of mastigophiliacs?

Parthenophilia is a liking for virgins. A traditional motif in many horror spoof films is the concept that once a girl loses her virginity she will almost immediately be killed by the vampire / werewolf / psychotic knife-wielding homicidal maniac. There is a darker side, however. In some cultures it was / is regarded as a rich man's privilege to take a virgin to help them keep their sexual vigour. It is said to have been popular in Victorian Britain and even China's Chairman Mao was rumoured to have been partial to young virgins.

Scopophilia is the fetish of obtaining sexual pleasure by looking at erotic objects, such as most teenage boys would be familiar with in their magazine collection (or their Dad's). It is a natural partner of exhibitionism, the fetish of showing yourself off or exposing yourself in a sexually provocative manner.



The love of being tickled, especially with a feather, is Pteronophilia. Bestiality is using the whole chicken. I know of no films that include this Pteronophilia fetish – maybe I should make one.

A fetish for women's underwear is cryptovestiphilia, a common motif in saucy British comedies. I don't know why, ask the Brits.

Klismaphilia is a liking of enemas for sexual gratification. Although enemas are recorded way back in history as a medical treatment the fetish element has only been noted during the 20th century.

The classic enema fetish film is *Water Power* (1977), credited to Gerard Damiano but actually produced by Shaun Costello. (available from *Cinema de Bizarre*) Although the level of compulsion shown in the administration of enemas makes this film verge on the pornographic, it is the mental effect on the Enema Bandit that is the main theme of the film. <http://www.sexinfo101.com/enema.shtml> has an excellent and humorous discussion of the topic

These forms of fetish are generally publically acceptable, if frowned upon by those who don't have the body or taste for it. As you can see, though, there's something for almost everybody and all have been depicted in film. Are they really kinky? Some may be better enjoyed in the privacy of the home, but if depicted in film they won't lead to the downfall of society as we know it.

The Independent Cinema of David Blyth



"One of the great mavericks of New Zealand Film"

N.Z Listener

While New Zealand has become known as Middle Earth and the tale of *The Lord of the Rings* will never be the same again due to the unswerving dedication and unique vision of Peter Jackson. New Zealand has produced many great filmmakers and one who is lesser known is David Blyth.

Blyth was a young Auckland arts student who essentially trained himself in moviemaking by watching "lots and lots of films". He was particularly taken by the films of Buñuel and Dali's *Un Chien Andalou*. His first attempt at cinema is a black and white short called *Circadian Rhythms* (1976).

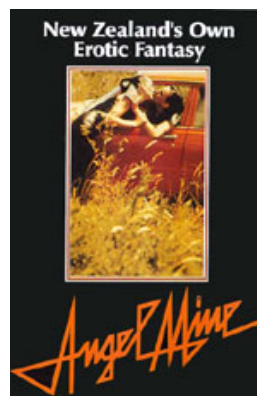
This short attempts to "slip past the conscious mind" as it explores what goes through the psyche of a man who has had a car crash. At the age of 22 Blyth produced his debut feature, *Angel Mine* (1978), a fascinating film which combines



A scene from Angel Mine

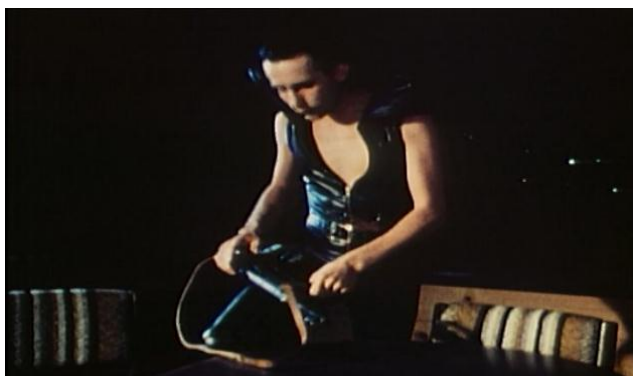
...surrealism, biting social commentary and eroticism. It is a strange and surreal exploration of relationships, sexuality and consumerism.

It has bizarre dreamlike sequences mixed with relatively explicit sex scenes, suburban living and social criticism. It takes aim at crass materialism and even offers a premonition of Viagra in its depiction of "Angel Mine" as a new drug to increase libido. It is certainly unusual for 1978 to have such a honest depiction of sexual activity.



The score is a superb mixture of piano even classical type music, what is now considered Lounge and some great punk tracks. The use of radio broadcasts and voice over to offer biting social commentary is also very successful.

Angel Mine is available with *Circadian Rhythms* as an extra directly from David Blyth's website.



David Blyth in Angel Mine



A hot sex scene from Angel Mine



Zombie from *Death Warmed Up*

In 1984 a few years shy of Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste* (1987), Blyth shocked his audiences with New Zealand's very first horror film. It is a wild ride and was really very successful for the time.

Death Warmed Up (1984) is a fascinating horror story on many levels. It combines eroticism (including homoerotic themes), horror and transgressive content to create a superior tale about the limits of science. Once again Blyth takes aim at our consumerist society, this time with our obsession with longevity at all costs. The film itself has the overarching tale of a father manipulating his own son for medical experimentation and using him to dispose of an adversary.

After years in a mental institution, the son returns for revenge. There is a uncomfortable homoerotic element within the father/son relationship including a startling scene when the naked son is "penetrated" in the backside with a large hypodermic. Blyth is never afraid to challenge and *Death Warmed Up* has medical procedures, gore, eroticism and action. Many of the set-pieces are memorable including the "new wave" punk presentation of the hospital, the strange



Mad scientists in *Death Warmed Up*



Dominatrix from *Bound for Pleasure*

shower scene and the van-car chase. The cinematography is excellent with beautiful New Zealand landscape somehow transformed to create a real sense of terror and madness.

There are also truly perverse one-liners such as when the mutants in the hospital van are watching the couple make out in the ferry and one says to the other "*I love the smell of blond pussy in the morning*".

Death Warmed Up while made in 1984 still stands the test of time and works well as an unusual and multilayered horror film.

While Blyth has worked on various Hollywood and mainstream productions his interests seem decidedly darker with an obsession with eroticism and the nature of the unconscious.

In 2002 he explored his interests in pain and pleasure with a documentary on dominatrices, *Bound for Pleasure*. *Bound for Pleasure* explores the works of BDSM through a series of interviews and dungeon sequences by respected dominatrices.

The interviews are challenging but informative



Foot worship in *Bound for Pleasure*



Sexual domination in *Bound for Pleasure*

and since a diverse range of dominatrixes are interviewed we gain insight into the sheer diversity within the field. It is fascinating to see these characters and how they range from the well informed and educated to the more suburban and well, the downright weird. Some play the bitch role while others are the domineering mother.

We are also introduced to a range of practices including bondage, whipping, caning, latex, heterosexual anal sex and so on. There is also a discussion of transvestism in a bondage context.

It is a sexually explicit documentary but is clearly focused on being informative rather than simply being for titillation.

A small number of submissives are also interviewed to offer some understanding from those who are on the other end of the practice. More recently, he has released *Transfigured Nights* (2009), a documentary about the world of web



Rubber Fetishism in *Transfigured Nights*

cam mask performers. This is a world of cyber personalities and hyper sexuality, where a diverse range of individuals take on new personas for their web-based performances.

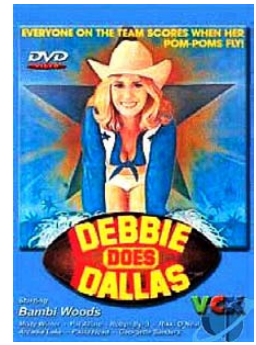
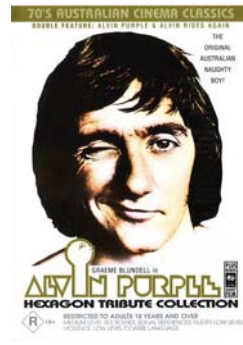
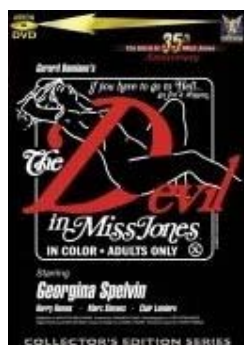
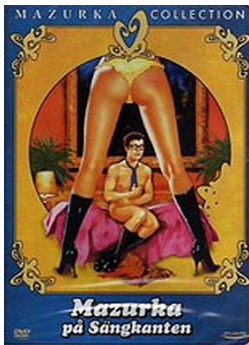
We met the Rubber-encased, Gas-masked More Rubber Please Sir, the hog tied and large breasted Hog-Tied and the ex-Vietnam Vet who is now Miss Piggy who dresses in frocks and wears a pig mask while having a very good time.

This is an unusual film created primarily from internet sources and is the only documentary exploring a new world which takes a huge leap beyond virtual characters and role playing games or MMO such as World of Warcraft. Here you literally become a new character in the safety of your own home and beam it to the world. This is a cyber-character taken to an ultimate degree. This is a strange, wonderful, brutally honest, and at times, shocking doco.

Blyth is now working on *Wound*, a supernatural Horror Film. Set against a backdrop of Internet web cameras, it explores the dark worlds of mental illness, incest, revenge and death. *Wound* is a reinterpretation of the Demeter-Persephone mythological story (a mother having to save her child from the clutches of Hades).

We follow the ghostly Tanya as she searches for the mother she has never met – Susan who gave her up for dead after being abused by her own father. After committing suicide, Tanya returns to confront and possess Susan with all her deepest fears and desires, sending Susan into a state of madness and gore-filled retribution.





The Ins & Outs of Adult Cinema



A scene from *The Kiss* (1896)

Naked women and other adult themes featured in movies almost since they were invented. Edward Muybridge filmed nude men and women in his earliest test moving films of 1884. The first kiss on film is attributed to the Edison Kinetoscope short film *The Kiss* (1896). It scandalised the Catholics enough that they demanded that their standards of morality be enforced. Censorship was introduced. The earliest erotic films often had pretences of artistic merit, featuring women in natural or artistic settings and apparently demonstrating the beauty of the female form at one with nature. Or something along these lines. The cost of production and projection equipment kept the market very small for many years.

As the film industry grew, especially in the United States, the idea of the "film vamp" was introduced – a young lady of attractive qualities who would indulge in such suggestive activities as (gasp!) drinking, smoking and kissing. Theda Bara was one of the first "sex symbols" and her fame was mostly due to these inflammatory acts of misbehaviour. In 1916 Annette Kellerman appeared nude under a waterfall and this sort of licentiousness stirred things up again. The calls to Do Something About It began to increase. The filmmakers faced a dilemma – voluntarily control their profitable film themes or face enforced censorship.

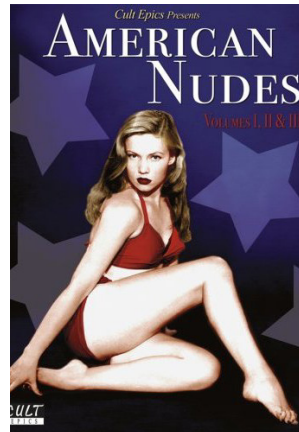
They chose voluntary control. From the 1930s any erotic values in mainstream filmmaking in the United States were controlled by the Hays Code. This was a voluntary code that the producers and makers of films imposed on themselves to cut out "morally offensive" material. Whose "moral values" was carefully not defined. Since the U.S. was one of the biggest producers of film, this effectively controlled the market for many years. In fairness to the Hays Code it also included prohibitions on depictions of murder, cruelty to children and animals, racial slurs, violence and drugs. Thus we had the strange convention in Westerns that in a gunfight the shooter and the victim were not to appear in the same shot. The shooter would shoot, then the film cut to the victim who would be hit.

During World War II the technology of film took a huge leap. Partly this was due to the need for inexpensive field cameras to take propaganda footage, partly due to the development of cheap gun cameras to film aerial combat and verify the number of kills claimed by pilots. After the War this translated into the inexpensive 8 mm film and cameras designed for the home market. In 1965 this was simplified to the even less expensive Super 8 format.

Both these formats were used to produce quickie skin flicks of the kind better known as "stag films". They followed the style of the arcade peepshow so popular with servicemen and young lads during the War. Typically they were short (three to five minutes), black and white without sound, and featured young ladies rolling around on a bed. Sex was never shown. (A 1913 film, *A Free Ride*, was reportedly the first stag film and DID feature intercourse). Sometimes a more lavish production would change to a different shot in another room. These peepshows were never intended for private distribution but somehow some found their way into private hands.

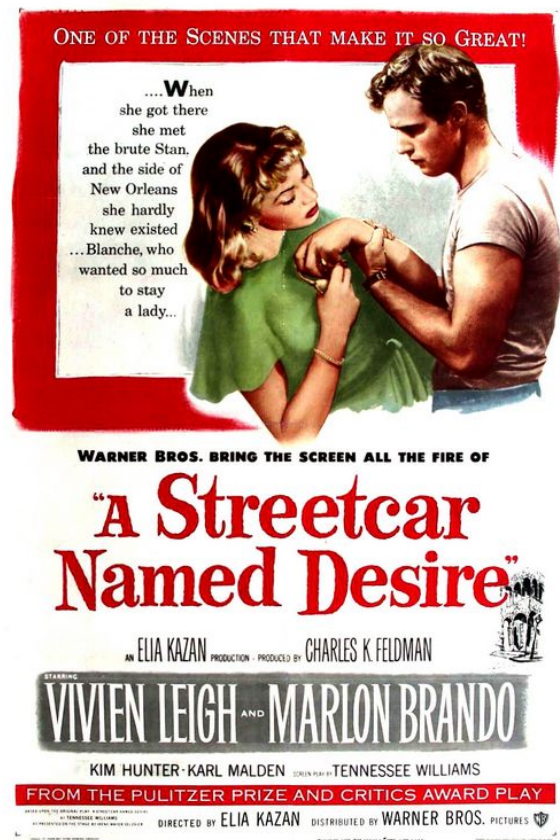
There is a review of *Nude In Dracula's Castle* (released 2009) in an earlier issue of this magazine that goes into a little more detail. This compilation film has some excellent examples of the genre.

A further interesting collection in this vein is the *American Nudes* (2008-2009) series from Cult Epics. It offers another rare peek into the history of American erotic cinema. It focuses on these short "stag" films. Volume One features a compilation of short nude films produced in the 1940's as Hollywood Beauties, in addition to nudist camp films and underwater films. Volume Two features a compilation of short films from the 1950's starring wrestling women and exotic girls, outdoors and in the home. Volume Three, exclusively in this three disc set, features a compilation of soft and hard-core films from the 1960s and 1970s, a celebration of boy-girl, girl-girl, and couple action.



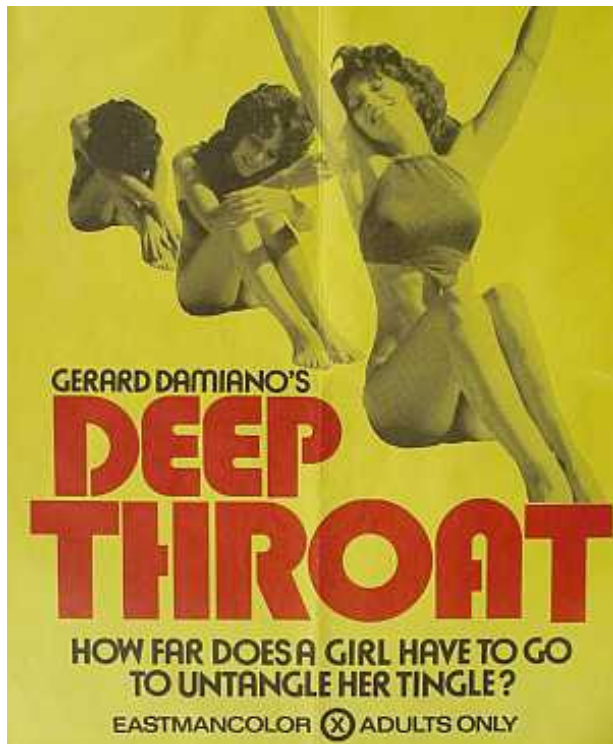
As Super 8 moved into the market in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with its options of sound and colour, producers began to produce more elaborate films. They were still limited to around ten minutes (the length of a Super 8 reel) and sound was rarely used even though the specification for the film allowed it. In the previous issue there is a review of *Sleazy Stags*, another compilation that shows this type of stag film. Sex was now included, indeed expected, and the films started to lose some of their quaint look and move more towards pornography than erotica.

The Hays code was still acknowledged by the industry, so we had that dreadful run of charming, innocent and absolutely boring films starring the wholesome likes of Doris Day. Despite these or perhaps because of them the Hays Code was already under pressure from mainstream films like Mae West's suggestive comedies and the rise in "period costume dramas" that allowed low slung, revealing dresses. The themes of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) forced an update to the code, but it wasn't enough. Regardless of Hays and the Decency League pretending to high moral values, the film producers knew what their audiences



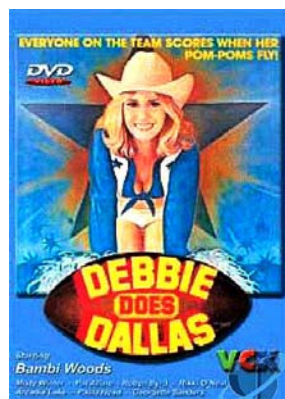
wanted and where the money was to be made. The sex symbols like Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot made their reappearance and foreign films like *And God Created Woman* (1956) increasingly entered the U.S market. *And God Created Woman* pushed the limits of sexuality in film (NOT sex) and was condemned by the Catholic League of Decency. This, of course, ensured its success. In the face of reality the Hays Code was finally abandoned in the late 1960s.

At this point we should probably examine the difference between erotica and pornography at that time, since the difference was becoming more pronounced. From the censorship point of view in the 1970s, films would still face classification if they offended "community standards", that hangover from the Hays Code. These "standards" were always undefined but still tended to reflect the religion-inspired beliefs of the vocal and politically active minority. Even though God never seems to have expressed an opinion on erotica in film, the Bible-thumpers were absolutely sure what He would disapprove of. Nudity (from behind) was frowned on. Frontal nudity was absolutely unacceptable. Any depiction of sex was pornography, regardless of the context. No one could agree on exactly what "pornography" was, though. The standard reasoning was "I can't define it, but I'll



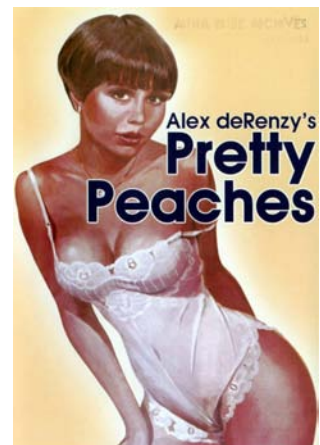
know it when I see it". As a result the stag film remained firmly underground, to be viewed in the garage with a few drinking mates. During the early Seventies serious adult film did achieve a level of theatrical release in what came to be known as Grindhouse cinemas. These cinemas, usually in the sleazy end of town, released a diverse range of sexual and exploitation content. The most successful title of this period was *Deep Throat* (1972). Meanwhile the wowsers still claimed the high moral ground as they had for decades, and they were going to keep it.

In the late 1970s home videotape arrived. It was the liberating factor for home viewing of film erotica. With a huge and rapidly growing market many professional filmmakers moved into the genre. Their expertise lifted erotica from the level of the "skin flick" to that of the full-scale feature film. While the wowsers and legislators tried to work out how to control what people watched in their own home, filmmakers were producing erotic classics like the immortal *Debbie Does Dallas* (1978), *Farmers Daughters* (1976) and *Sexworld* (1977).



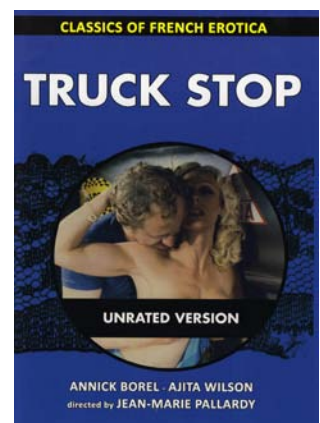
These were full length features with good plots, professionally filmed, even well acted. Sex was a part of the content but it was tied into the plot, so the films are better classified now as erotica rather than pornography. Even most of the sex scenes are fairly tame by today's standards.

Some films used sex as humour and they turned into erotic comedies and spoofs like *Flesh Gordon* (1974) or *Pretty Peaches* (1978)



Overseas countries developed their own distinct styles and we have looked at some of these in the French films of Jean-Marie Pallardy (*My Body Burns*, *Truck Stop*, *Erotic Diary of a Lumberjack* etc.) or Danish erotic humour like the *Agent 69 Jensen* range or *Danish Bedroom Ma-zurka*.

The Germans were a bit more serious but still enjoyed their erotica – have a look at the review of *Naughty Nymphs* (1974) in an earlier issue.



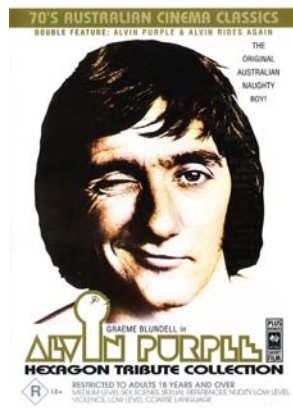
Even Playboy Enterprises in the United States got into the act. We reviewed their *Black Venus* (1983) a few issues back. Many of these films made it out of the private market and into mainstream cinema distribution, but usually as late

night shows. In this time slot they attracted little adverse attention. In the United States “foreign film” was almost a standard term for films with a higher erotic content although it is surprising how many were made in the U.S. underground film industry.

Even the odd parts of erotica were being explored, such as fetishism (see the separate article in this issue). Films like *The Devil In Miss Jones* (1973) and *Water Power* (1977) examined previously taboo areas, but did it (usually) with style. Exploitation films became a separate genre.

Other countries adapted casually to the new morality and started to absorb erotic themes into their own films. In some cases they adapted quite enthusiastically and so Australia produced such cheeky films as *Alvin Purple* (1973) – happy, inoffensive and a bit of a laugh. *Alvin Purple* was designed to poke fun at current sexual morality on film, which it did very well.

Even the British had a go at including suggestive themes in films like *Percy* (1971), a film about a penis transplant. *Percy* didn’t even show a penis, or much of anything else, but the very idea was enough to bring out the morality fanatics who declared it pornographic – without even seeing it in many cases. With the rest of the world quite content with a bit of erotica in their films, it left the United States strangely out of tune. With the money to be made from erotic films it was inevitable that quality would fall and the exploiters would enter the market. In the United States the “money shot” became the key point of a film. Actors



were now rated on how well they could ejaculate on command, not on their acting ability. The emphasis was on gratuitous sex, not plot. This strangely American fetish gave the wowzers the opening they needed. As standards fell, so the demands rose for government control of what was now called “the porn industry”. Banning a film in one state did not stop people buying by mail order, so laws were passed that restricted the U.S. Postal Service being used to send pornographic materials. This meant that the industry was now concentrated in the few states that held out against “morality” laws.

The Internet offered a new distribution medium, but at this moment there are religiously-inspired political debates, not about whether what people send or receive on the Internet should be censored, but about the best way to do it. In Australia the debate over the “Great Firewall of Australia” seems all but over. Internet providers will be required to filter “objectionable” content from their traffic. Again, no one seems able to define what is “objectionable” and to whom. The list of banned sites will be secret. Singapore and China already have such a system in place and in China it is used to restrict information on political subjects such as the Tibetan independence issue.

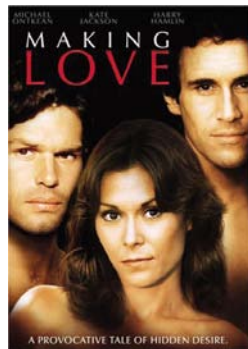
Does it really matter? Modern erotic films have become stilted and formula ridden and have little particular artistic merit. The same can be said of Disney Studios kids shows, though. The erotica films depict sex acts in glorious living colour with full detail. So do David Attenborough nature documentaries. Erotic films may depict violence, unusual and perverse acts and antisocial behaviour. Have you watched the TV news lately? The old problem of defining porn is a minefield and politicians should beware of walking into it no matter who is telling them they must do it.

Constantly and deliberately they miss the main point – it’s none of their business. The politicians and their religious supporters are simply on a power trip and they will not accept that these films are just depictions of people enjoying themselves.

Out of interest we have included in this issue a review of *2040*, a typical modern U.S. formula porn film (Wicked Pictures 2009) to see what the fuss is about as well as a range of reviews of erotica, retro-erotica and fetish titles. Erotic acts are now quite acceptable in mainstream cinema as a part of normal human behaviour.



From the tender love scenes of so many films to the ménage-a-trois of *Making Love* (1982), with its homosexual themes, erotica is a natural part of life and therefore of film. Perhaps I should point out that *Love Story* (1970), that most boring and inoffensive film, actually features people kissing (!) and would therefore be regarded as pornographic under the old Hays Code.



In many cases the films are more realistic reflections of life than, say, a murder mystery or a war film. There is of course the seedier side of erotica in film. Much of this appears in the horror genre.

Although sometimes it is a vital part of the plot it is often emphasised for shock value. Even the shock value is wearing off these days, forcing producers once again to concentrate on traditional values like plot and acting.

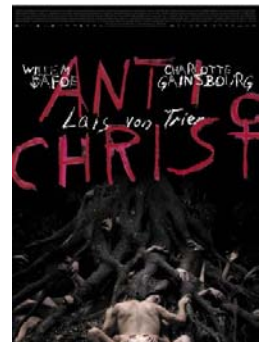
In more recent times films such as *Irreversible* (2003), *9 Songs* (2004) and *Anti-Christ* (2009)



A scene from *Making Love* (1982)

have included explicit sex scenes but within the context of a traditional film narrative.

That is the essential point. With changing values what was once regarded by some as pornographic is now regarded by the majority as simply part of life. Those who complain about declining moral values are not only working in the face of public opinion, but they are fighting against something that probably never existed. Urging censorship is simply trying to impose your repressive views on others by legislation where persuasion has failed to convince.



There IS a place for some sort of censorship over film, but not control. In an advisory capacity censorship could have its value. The viewer has a right to be informed if what they are going to watch has content that may offend them. In a Truth in Rating system, for example, AO could now mean that the film contains adult themes and may not be suitable for the kiddies. S would be for blatantly sexual films, the old "porn". V would be for violence, a matter of increasing concern. ST would be Supernatural Themes to cover areas like vampires, zombies, religion, Creationism and other non-provable themes. None of these would be banned, since such a ratings system would be simply advisory. It would be up to the viewer to decide if it was worth watching, according to their own beliefs or preference.

At Synergy we have deliberately not reviewed some films such as *Chaos* (2008) because of their complete lack of entertainment value. *Chaos* is a particularly violent film with little plot, but even it would fit into this advisory system.

History has shown that banning some types of behaviour on film just doesn't work – the viewing public still want it and will get access to it somehow. The ones who try to push censorship on us are denying reality. Since the film industry largely reflects life, it will also at times include erotica.

Explorations of Sex & Gender in the Cinema of Monika Treut



Monika Treut was born in Germany, on April 6th 1954. Her childhood was marked by a free and open approach to sexuality and she soon came to identify as a lesbian even though she likes to avoid defining herself by her gender or sexuality. She studied literature and politics at Philipps-University, Marburg and in the mid-seventies she began working with video. Her PhD thesis *The Cruel Woman: Female Images in the Writing of Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch* was published in Germany, Switzerland and Austria in 1984.

At the same time she founded Hyena Film Production with Elfi Mikesch and began producing, writing, and directing independent feature films. *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985) marked a radical change in queer cinema in that it broke new boundaries exploring sexuality in a psychological as well as erotic context. All of her films have been significant within the exploration of feminism, lesbianism, gender (including transgender issues) and Sado-Masochism. She has the ability to create films which combine a deep and insightful understanding of sexuality with a powerful sense of style and cinematic technique, as well as a good dose of play and humour.

Since 1990 Treut has also been teaching and lecturing at Colleges, Art Institutes and Universities throughout the United States. In 1992 she formed Hyena Films, Hamburg which continues to operate today.

Treut has a truly radical approach to sexuality, gender and emotion, rejecting traditional "identity concepts" which define humans via sexual or emotional activity or preferences and likes to explore the fluidity of experience. This is reflected in the unique way she explores characters in all of her films and documentaries.

Monika Treut has a fondness for hyenas. You could almost call it a fellow feeling. After all, in hyena society, the female is dominant and moreover, these are beasts which survive by



Monika Treut as female and male

scavenging for scraps, fearlessly standing up to larger predators for a share of the spoils. Such is the life of an independent filmmaker. When, in 1984, Treut and Elfi Mikesch, one of Germany's leading cinematographers and directors, decided to set up their own film production company, what else could they call it but 'Hyena Films'?

In truth, though Treut has a fearsome reputation, she hasn't quite grown a full set of canine teeth. Indeed, she is much more the survivor than the tearer of flesh. For many years, she has worked to the point of exhaustion to carve out a niche as an international filmmaker, writing and directing all her films, raising the production finance herself, editing, promoting and even, on occasion, distributing the finished product.

Monika Treut: An Outlaw At Home
Colin Richardson

Perversions are only Misunderstandings

Seduction: The Cruel Woman (1985)

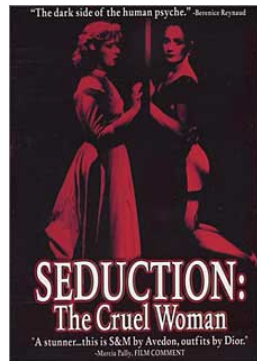
Seduction: The Cruel Woman (1985) is considered one of the most significant films exploring female dominance and the nature of power and sexuality. It is very different from traditional films on the subject in that it is not "exploitation" or "adult cinema" but a nuanced and textured study of the psychology of S & M which is both insightful and revealing. It certainly uses eroti-

cism and has explicit elements but these are within the context of the plot and are used in a manner which shows a true understanding of the power of storytelling.

It is a surprisingly complex film focusing on the interrelation between sex, emotion and power within all forms of relationships using superior character development and excellent performances to tell the tale. A rather young Udo Kier is brooding, beautiful and credible in his role as the love smitten masochist.

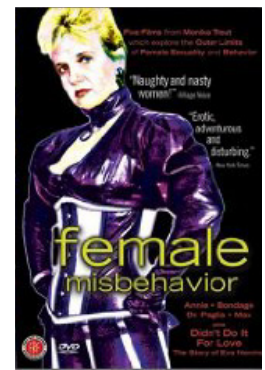
Seduction: The Cruel Woman emphasizes the psychology of both Sadism and Masochism while sustaining a highly erotic presentation. This balance between narrative, sexuality, style and character is remarkable. As a work of cinema it has a truly "Euro" visual style marked by lush colours and textures, a seductive sense of play, superb music score and a sophisticated plot. It is erudite and reflective but also profoundly beautiful. At times it feels like a giallo or European style thriller, filled with mystery and intrigue yet also packed with love and lust.

Wanda is a dominatrix who runs an "S & M performance space" on the Hamburg waterfront. Here audiences pay to watch her shows where she creates set-pieces involving the domination and humiliation of her male and female slaves. While Wanda seems to be in control, there is a blurring of the line between her work and her private life and traditional boundaries between what she does for a living and what she does in private do not exist. Her life begins to change as she leaves her lesbian lover (a shoe fetishist) for



a new apprentice; worse she has to contend with the eruptions of emotion from her male partner who has gone beyond the rules of their life together and fallen in love with her. The gallery becomes a centre for sexual, gender and emotional exploration but also pushes the boundaries of each participant as they have to reconcile their emotions with their desires leading to explosive results.

Female Misbehaviour (1992) is a series of short films including *Annie*, *Bondage*, *Dr. Paglia*, *Max* as well as a full length documentary film on Eva Norvind, *Didn't Do It for Love*.



The series opens with a sequence of short films exploring radical women who take a new approach to eroticism, feminism and sexuality. *Annie* documents the life of Annie Sprinkle; porn star, feminist and sexual explorer. We see how Ellen Steinberg transforms into Annie Sprinkle and brings a new dimension to sexual performance combining explicit sex shows with sex education. A veteran of literally hundreds of porn films she discusses her life and shows us a different side to the sex industry.

In *Bondage* we explore the world of women who use leather and bondage not only as a sexual outlet but as a socio-political statement. *Dr. Paglia* explores the fascinating interplay of the personal and the academic in the life of Dr. Camille Paglia. Paglia, a radical lesbian feminist academic is provocative, confronting and brutally honest. She discusses everything from sex, patriarchy, 1950's sexual suppression to feminism, her opinions are never what you expect. In *Max* we meet Max Valero, a female to male transsexual who not only tells us his life story but introduces us to the fluidity of gender and sexuality.

Didn't Do It For Love is a full length documentary which documents the life, films and experiences of Eva Norvind who became Mexico's blonde bombshell and Marilyn Monroe clone in the Fifties, espousing free love and exploring the boundaries of sexuality. She vanished after a small number of highly successful films and controversial affairs and resurfaced as a dominatrix in New York in the Eighties, where she continued her exploration. Her wild life included all manner of affairs, drug running, sexual ex-



Udo Kier in *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*



perimentation and fighting for women's sexual and reproductive rights within the very Catholic Mexico, moving to New York to explore new horizons.

In *Virgin Machine* (1998) Treut takes an artistic approach to sexual and gender exploration offering us a film which explores many of the themes found in her documentaries. Dorothee, a journalist from Hamburg writes about the sex behind the illusions of romance while fantasizing that California is a women's utopia populated solely by black lesbian Amazons! When she decides to explore her dreams she finds San Francisco a hotbed of sexual exploration, love and lots of lust. It is a brutally honest portrayal of revolutionary sexuality, gay, straight and somewhere indeed with lots of great dialogue and a stylish black and white presentation.



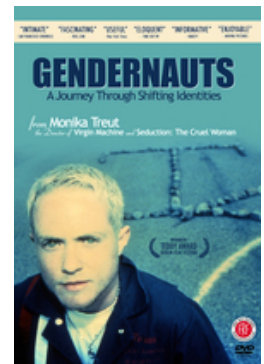
Gendernauts (1999) is a fascinating exploration of the fluidity of gender and sexuality. The film opens with a discussion of the female spotted Hyena, she is different from what we perceive as "female"; she is larger than the male, more aggressive and has a Clitoris which is far larger than the male Hyena's penis. It is actually considered the largest Clitoris of all animal species



Sandy Stone in *Gendernauts*

and defined as a "pseudo penis" by biologist due to its size and function.

This discussion is used to encourage us to reconsider our "binary" understanding of gender. As we begin to consider the human species the traditional understanding of "male/Female" is brought into question as we come to meet a range of people who outside of this spectrum. Broadly this group is called transgender, meaning those who transcend traditional gender roles. Gender roles are both genetically defined and social constructs and throughout the film we are made to consider how we understand what is male and female.



The diversity of the transgender spectrum is vast including intersex individuals (who are born with both male and female genitals), pre-op and post-op transsexuals and gendernauts who decide to move beyond their birth gender. The various means of transition are also discussed with an emphasis on both hormones and social roles.

This documentary explores these new horizons through a range of fascinating individuals including Sandy Stone, an academic in gender research, Annie Sprinkle, porn star and sexual explorer and many others. Each discusses not only their own story of shifting identity, but the way in which this transformation informed their lives and work. *Gendernauts* is insightful, thought provoking and very informative.

Monika Treut's films are available from First Run Features—<http://www.firstrunfeatures.com>

2040
Wicked Cinema
All Region NTSC
(E)

2040 is a good example of the current crop of better adult films.

It is also quite typical of the current American style of this genre. Its qualities include high production values that would be the envy of many an independent filmmaker - professional lighting and scripting, Dolby 5.1 and good props and scenery.

It even has a plot, far more than many of the current sex exploitation films. A virulent plague has made sex just about extinct, so people must gain satisfaction with sex androids or by masturbation. The porn film industry is doing well in these times, providing visual stimulation for the do-it-yourselfers. They use androids for their sex scenes but something is missing. The androids just don't have that "human" feel.

A young inventor has come up with a much more "human" android and it is going to capture the porn film market because of its lifelike qualities. A porn actor, Ryan, tries out the prototype and is impressed. Although it has a substantial memory capacity it has only been programmed for one thing. Ryan spends time with the android teaching her about the human world and gradually she starts to understand human emotions and behaviour.

Unfortunately the inventor was working for one of the android firms, Real Dolls International, when he invented the android. The owner of RDI quite naturally feels that the android is his company's property and he steals the android and kills the inventor. Ryan must now steal her back, since he is falling in love with her as she



becomes more human. This would be a credible plot for a standard science fiction film, but in this genre it is purely a link between the sex scenes. These are fairly conventional if comprehensive and frankly they are extended to the point that they become rather boring after a while. They are accompanied by a thrash guitar track that is simply dreadful. I would rather listen to the android's incomprehensible moaning.

Some of the boredom is made up for by the continuity and other lapses in the film. It starts with the Director's name being spelt wrong during the opening titles. Then there is the Incredible Disappearing Condom. The U.S. Surgeon-General has apparently recommended that in the interests of reducing the spread of sexually transmitted disease, actors in porn films should set a good example and wear condoms. These magically appear on the actors (the male ones) when the intercourse starts and just as magically disappear when it's time for the money shot - which is then completely unprotected. You never see the condom being put on or taken off - it's just there (sometimes).

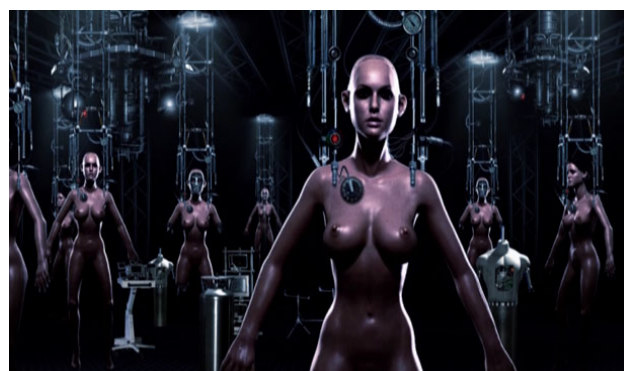
The women all have that glossy plastic look that can only be achieved with large amounts of silicone and Botox. Some of the human actresses appear more plastic-looking than the android. They also, of course, wear ridiculous high heeled shoes during sex - a fetish that appears to be peculiarly American. This stereotype of the "sexy woman" is so artificial that I wonder if the film producers have ever done any research into what American men find sexy. Surely they don't fantasise about screwing a Barbie Doll with boobs?

As befits a higher-budget film, Wicked has included two DVDs of extras with deleted scenes, interviews and all the usual bits.

2040 is very much a formula film. It is quite a good porno film if this is what you like, but I can't help feeling that it is time for a change away from this sort of stilted film style.



Scenes from 2040 (Wicked Films)

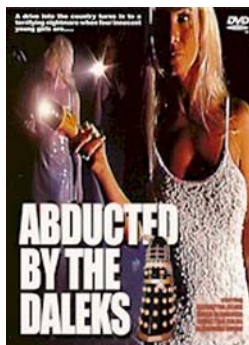


**Abducted by The Daleks
Aka Abducted by the Daloids
Teraz Films
All Region DVD**

This hilarious spoof is a tits-out take-off of Doctor Who's worst enemies. It was called Abducted by the Daleks until the BBC and the estate of Dalek inventor Terry Nation took exception to the name and threatened legal action. Although it is unmistakably British, it has been disguised to look more European by giving the actresses European-sounding names. Even the crew get into the act with the writer credited as being "Billy Hartnell" (William Hartnell played the first Doctor Who) and I suspect "Patrick Baker" is a homage to two other Doctors, Patrick Troughton and Tom Baker. Producer "Don Skaro" is better known as Trevor Barley or Roman Nowicki, but the planet Skaro is known to Doctor Who fans as the Daleks' home planet. The disguise doesn't fool anyone as the British accents keep slipping in.

The plot is about as basic as they come. A group of disco dummies on their way to a night club hit an alien on a lonely road in the middle of the forest. Now their car won't start. There is a serial killer known to be lurking in the forest. He skins his victims alive. Faced with this, would you a) stay in the car or b) walk along the road hoping someone will come past and help you or c) strike off into the forest in your high heels and brief dresses, in search of who knows what? C) of course. While going through the forest, only stopping to strike an occasional pose, most of the girls lose their clothing for one reason or another.

They are being watched by the Daleks in their spaceship and are captured and taken aboard for "interrogation". The Daleks want to find out more about Earth people to see if they can conquer the planet. Despite numerous threats that



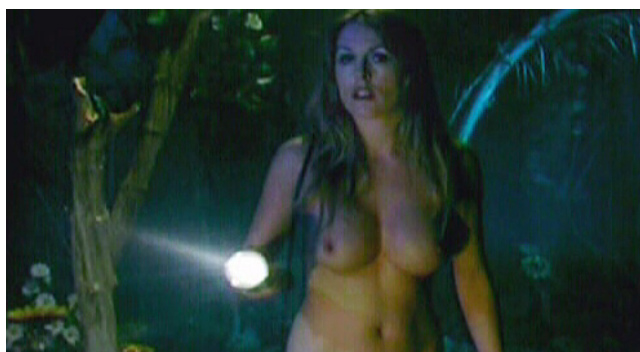
Abducted by Daleks

the girls will be exterminated if they don't answer the Daleks' question, no questions are actually asked. One girl escapes and beams back down to the planet, but her body has been taken over by the Daleks' interrogator, a whip-cracking dominatrix. She finds herself naked in the middle of the forest in the middle of a cold night, with a serial skinner lurking somewhere. Would you a) run like hell and get away from the place or b) find clothing and a weapon or c) apply lipstick? Naturally, it's c) again. And just as naturally the serial skinner finds her and ties her to a tree. He is about to do what serial skinners do when he is attacked and killed by another alien – the woods are full of them tonight. She escapes and goes to the local police, who seem strangely unwilling to give her any clothing or even to take her story seriously.

I would like to say the ending is startling and horrifying, but I can't. Such an ending just wouldn't be right for this film. It mercilessly pinches bits from other films. Even the door in the Dalek ship opens with a Star Trek-like sound. The background sound effects come from some 50's B-grade space movie. The special effects are awesome for their total lack of believability. At least the girls are quite attractive, and you get to see a lot of them. The costume department must have drunk the budget.

But wait, there's more. The DVD also has an alternative version of the film with all the outtakes left in. Here we can see that the film is definitely British as the girls fluff their lines repeatedly. It has a couple of great moments like the time when the girls are handcuffed to the wall (full frontal, of course) and about to be killed by the Daleks. One girl takes her hand out of the restraint, scratches her pussy, then puts her hand back into the restraint. You won't see that on Doctor Who. Overall it's a great film. I haven't laughed so much in a long time.

Web: <http://www.terazfilms.co.uk>



The Alcove
Severin Films
R1 DVD
(E)

Joe D'Amato may be known as the king of sleaze but *The Alcove* is a refined sort of sleaze. Erotic, sensual and explicit, it is marked by an excellent plot, lots of character development and excellent cinematography.

It is a film that divides fans due to its slavery based plot, but when this is taken in context it actually becomes a superb example of D'Amato's ability to make refined eroticism with intriguing subtexts and many historians of erotica believe this is D'Amato's best work.

There is actually a lot to think about behind the "heat" in this movie. The film juxtaposes the supposed "naturalism" of the sex life of the African slave/princess with the staid and somewhat suppressed sexuality of the white man and ends up presently a rather textured work of erotic cinema.

The film is set during the 1940's when Italy made its foray into Africa. Al Cliver plays Elio, a well to do trader and soldier who after winning a bloody battle in Africa is required to take the Abyssinian princess Zerbal as part of the booty. Not that he seems to mind too much, the princess is played by the beautiful Laura Gemser.

Elio returns home to write his memoirs to find his home life is rather complicated. His wife Allesandra is insatiable and having a lesbian affair with his secretary. Zerbal carefully manipulates the tension between them all and works her way



Zerbal is transferred to Allesandra in a strangely erotic right of ownership

into Allesandra's bed deliberately encouraging the jealousies that are triggered. As Zerbal controls Allesandra's desires, she is able to plan her revenge against Elio who brought about the death of her brother and brought her to Italy as a slave.

This is an impressively intelligent work of eroticism. The character development is superior with a fascinating interplay between Elio, Allesandra, Zerbal, his secretary and the gardener. The way in which desire is manipulated as a form of power and domination gives the film an unusual texture and is matched with excellent dialogue, superb sets and seductive cinematography. A sub plot about making stag films adds to the tale as does discussion of the obvious racism of Italy's incursion into Africa.

At the same time this is a D'Amato film and it is filled with sensuality, nudity, lesbian lovemaking, voyeurism, drug use and more. All the women are beautiful and sexuality is explicit throughout the film. There are all sorts of erotic scenes set in all manner of unusual contexts, the nastiest scene being a faux inquisition nun scene which Elio creates (but Zerbal manipulates) for his stag film.

Severin has done an excellent job by presenting a totally uncut and uncensored edition of the film, the picture is very clear with an excellent score by Manuel De Sica. The English mono track has no problems and the dialogue is clear. Compared to any other releases of this film, this is vastly superior.

The major extra is "Talking Dirty with Joe D'Amato" a rare extended interview with Joe D'Amato from the mid Nineties.



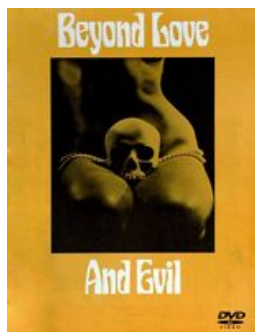
Nuns and Revenge !

Beyond Love and Evil (1970)
Cinema de Bizarre
DVD-R
(M)

Beyond Love and Evil aka De Sade 76 and The Philosophy of the Bedroom is a marvellously outré cult sex film which is loosely based on the hedonistic vision of the Marquis De Sade with a large dose of Sixties psychedelia and the occultism of Aleister Crowley. It was Directed by Jacques Scandolari.

Yalo (Fred Saint-James) is the master of a great French castle where he runs a community based on free love. He rejects the bourgeois morality and religious peccadillos of the outside world and trains his disciples in the way of passion. He encourages his initiates to explore all manner of pleasure, rejecting both "godliness and diabolism" and using the flesh as his point of reference. His "cult" is marked by unusual rites and ceremonies and a celebration of all manner of decadence, from the playful to exploring the limits of pain and pleasure. As the film progresses we come to experience his communities' exploration of sex through orgies, food sex, bondage and discipline, sadomasochism, a naked conga-line, lesbianism, sex with a squid (an especially unusual scene) and a range of other fetishes. There is even a wild man named Varlac who is kept locked in the basement and only occasionally let out for a wild sex hunt. All are presented with a uniquely Euro style matching excellent cinematography with eroticism, scored with a Jazzy Sixties soundtrack.

Yalo has met a beautiful young woman named Xenia whom he slowly trains to be free of her taboos and enter into his cult as his wife. How-



Sex cult leader Yalo

ever, a previous lover, Zenoff (Lucas de Chabagnieux), soon arrives on the scene and with the voice of morality and tradition stands against the perversions on show. Soon, however, he realizes that Xenia is happy with her lot. Frustrated by what he sees, he tries to get Xenia to escape and when lost in the forest, loses control and ravages on her wedding night. They return and she is married to Yalo in a pagan wedding rite accompanied by a ritualistic orgy. Xenoff won't give up and in a fit of fury kills Yalo, but he does not realize that Xenia has been liberated from her puritan ways and certainly won't be going back to the staid life of a subservient woman.

Now in charge of the cult, she decides to not only continue Yalo's work but to take things further with whippings, brandings, birchings and discipline; the initiates will not certainly get their fill of pain with their pleasure but if Zenoff wants to love her the cost will be rather high.

Beyond Love and Evil is a fascinating cult cinema romp filled with all sorts of weird sexual set-pieces ranging from horny fox hunts to an erotic rub-down with squid. It has a well-developed plot which combines a call to hedonism with a pan-sexual pagan worldview which is also notable for its quirky philosophical dialogues.

The outfits are suitably late Sixties with everyone looking like Hippies with wigs and wild make-up; there is a sense of play and humour which makes even the most bawdy scenes more fun rather than exploitative.

Many see Beyond Love and Evil as a significant work of cinema since it was the forerunner of the erotic cinema of France in the Seventies. It is very difficult to find a copy, luckily Cinema de Bizarre have a very good quality DVD-R available.

Web: <http://www.cinema-de-bizarre.com>



Erotic massage with squid !

Blood Scarab
Frontline
Entertainment
R1 DVD (M)

Blood Scarab opens with a nice tongue in cheek horror introduction, we get a quick historical overview of the life of Countess Elizabeth Bathory and then we are told the rest is speculation. This sets the stage for a rip roaring romp through every possible horror motif from Hammer Horror to scenes reminiscent of the Adam's Family, from "Vampire Lovers" like lesbian scenes to homage's to classic Hollywood Egypt and Mummy films. It is funny, witty, superbly made and above all, lots of fun.

It seems that the Countess Bathory, one of the great beauties of all times was a also little unhinged. She bathed in the blood of virgins to stay young but was having trouble finding the necessary "stock" to keep her bath filled and hence went on search to discover a more economical way to stay young. She found her answer in an alliance with Count Dracula. Together they now live in a castle in Los Angeles and somehow they have settled into a sort of Adam's Family/Munsters type lifestyle. However, things are not all that happy, Mrs.Dracula finds herself rather bored and wants to return to the good old days of the Bathories, of which she has lots of fond memories. These memory sequences are especially impressive with lots of sex, blood and eroticism, they are very nicely done as indeed is the cinematography throughout the whole of blood Scarab.

Disaster strikes as Dracula has been a little too pre-occupied with young girl flesh and while watching his next intended victims, Tanya and Mina, he loses track of time (Renfield being too occupied with bug catching), and is destroyed in classic style by the rising sun.

This time Bathory has had enough, he has been killed once too often ! She is now freed from Dracula cramping her style and decides it is time to whoop it up. There are lots of great scenes of lesbian love, blood drinking and more. Indeed it should be said the lesbian love scenes are highly charged, combined with evocative music, great lighting and superior filming. The soundtrack throughout the film is also superb ranging from classic horror soundtracks to Goth rock and pop.



Very sexy vampires in Blood Scarab

With a lot of partying and feeding to make up for she is rather annoyed at being only able to feed during the night. She also is a bit wary that Renfield will screw up again, this time on her watch, and that she will end up as "sun dust". So she sets Renfield on the task of discovering the means to achieve immortality during the day. This leads to a great intersection between vampires, mummies and Egyptian occultism. What a combination !!! It seems the 3000 year-old Mummy of Hor-Shep-Sut has walked out of a local museum and is actually the shell of an ancient lesbian sorceress from Egypt.

This leads to a great Egyptian flashback with all the pomp one would expect from an Egyptian Hollywood scene. It ends with a rather nasty embalming for Hor-She-Sut for seducing the Pharaoh's daughter. After a rather feisty love scene, she is captured, locked in a funerary mask and her heart pulled out and stuffed in a Canopic Jar, her body is left in an unmarked coffin.

A secret ritual unfolds with Renfield at his doddering best, Hor-She-Sut explains to Bathory how she can become immortal in the sunlight. However, as one might expect, two major Goddesses are going to have some girl problems ! As Bathory becomes a daywalker and Blood Goddess, Hathor steps in for a bitch fight. This



Lesbians, goddesses & Egyptian Mummies

is a great scene – vampire versus mummy, Goddess vs. undead. The climax is suitably fun as Renfield realizes that since crucifixes don't work then maybe the sacred Egyptian Scarab will and he despatches his evil mistress back to her grave.

Blood Scarab is cracking entertainment. It combines vampires, lesbians, beauty addicts, mummies and Egyptian Goddesses in a way which is a homage to the old world of Hammer Horror and classic Hollywood cinema. It includes motifs and images from so many films, all mixed together in a new and vital way to keep you chuckling, amused and entertained for every second of the film.

The cinematography is excellent; the special effects are cheesy but of high quality and the sets are amazing. This may be a moderate budget film but it has been made to look top notch and is a joy to watch. The music, mood and texture of the film is great, the actors are all superb ranging from the cackling Renfield to the various menagerie of barely clothed woman.

This is a film you will enjoy again and again, it has everything you need – sex, gore, lesbian love, vampires, mummies, fantasy, Egyptian Gods and more.

It is also packed with special features including a commentary track with director Donald F. Glut and stars Monique T. Parent, Del Howison and Natasha Diakova. An original trailer, a comprehensive making of documentary, deleted dancing handmaidens scene, a theatrical premiere video, interviews, Graveyard Theatre Stars, the Harvey and Bob Show Review, Countess Dracula and Mummy's Kiss Archives and six still galleries.

Web: <http://www.frontlinefilms.com/>

L.A. Pink Burning Angel All Region NTSC DVD (E)

Joanna Angel and her company Burning Angel have produced some truly original and outrageous XXX films. They are willing to push the envelope and explore beyond the mainstream and offer titles which are both highly erotic but controversial and different. In my mind what they offer is a significant development in erotica, too much mainstream porn is formulaic and features plastic looking models with little to no plot and no humour.



LA Pink: A XXX Porn Parody is loads of fun; it is a great plot, lots of humour as well as wallops of sex. It is a hilarious and horny tale about tattoos, being a female entrepreneur in a male-dominated world...and having an insatiable sex drive. It's a parody loosely based on TLC's reality TV show "LA Ink", and is written and directed by award-winning starlet Joanna Angel. This combination of a well written story with good plot, amusing characters and a great sense of humour adds something extra to the XXX content.

At the same time the sex on show is diverse and "edgy", there are lots of stunning tattooed ladies who know what they want and are not shy about demanding satisfaction. Scenes range from masturbation, lesbian action, group scenes, individuals scenes and quite an impressive orgy at the end of the film with five beautiful women. There are some eight hot sex scenes in all. The sex is enthusiastic and I like the way that these wild girls are always in control.





Joanna Angel and Draven Star

There is a real sense that they enjoy what they are doing and that the sex is certainly credible, right down to the wet sex noises.

The story is about Joanna Von Angel who is a world-renowned tattoo artist and runs the L.A. Pink Tattoo parlour. She has hired some of the sexiest artists in the industry to be part of her staff, all of which play hard as well as working hard. Sean Michaels plays the CEO of a frozen pizza company walks into Joanna's life with a business proposition, but it is one with a catch. The way he slowly transforms from a genuine businessmen into a would-be dic(k)tator is genuinely funny. The humour running through the film is very successful, I especially like poor Brian Street Team, who can't get any clients, male or female.

The amazing thing about L.A. Pink is that it works as a conventional film. The acting is solid, the filming excellent and the depiction of a reality TV very credible. The quality of the DVD is excellent with a great soundtrack, the theme music This is my Anthem by Shiragirl is pretty cool too.

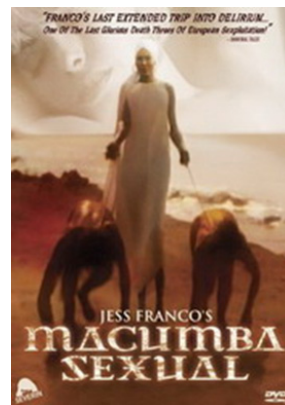
This is a very innovative adult film which has the best plot and acting I have seen in a XXX film. It is creative, amusing and, of course, very horny. L.A. Pink is a double DVD with lots of extras "extra shit".

There are four trailers, website info and a photo gallery. The behind-the-scenes documentary is loads of fun and continues the great sense of humour found in the film.

Web: <http://www.burningangel.com>

Macumba Sexual
Jess Franco
Severin Films
R0 DVD (M)

Macumba Sexual dates from 1981 and is considered by many to be Jess Franco's best film, offering a truly unique and surreal exploration of sexual transgression.



Alice and her husband are on holiday in the Canary Islands. While she is having a very relaxed time, her sleep is regularly disrupted by vivid and recurring dreams about a beautiful and seductive black woman known as Tara. In the dream she is both attracted and terrified of Tara who seems to wander the beaches on a local island with two naked slaves and then dies with a strange idol between her legs.

Her holiday is interrupted by a phone call from her employer asking her to visit a client on a local Island who wishes to buy a property. She is reluctant to break her leisure time but being offered a nice percentage of the sale reluctantly agrees to take the commission.

The journey to the island is unconventional and includes a boat trip on a old style ship and a journey by camel. For some reasons she travels in a way too tight top and a pair of very tight shorts which give her a truly revealing "camel toe!"

When she arrives, she finds herself in a peculiar Moorish resort owned by Princess Obongo. She instantly identifies Obongo as the Tara of



Princess Obongo and Slaves

her dreams, but rather than being frightened finds herself strangely attracted. Soon she is seduced by Obongo (with the help of her naked slaves Poppy and Tulip) and beings to experience a new world of sexual abandon, voodoo (Macumba) and sorcery.

On one level Macumba Sexual could be seen as a eccentric adaptation of the Dracula story. Alice is the real estate agent, Obongo is the Voodoo Priestess (the Dracula equivalent), her "vampires" are slaves Poppy and Tulip and the rather pervy hotel manager (played by Franco himself) is Renfield.

But this sells the film short. The power of Franco's work is in its dreamlike quality. It places emphasis on texture and atmosphere, rather than on narrative. Indeed there are long periods in Macumba Sexual when hardly a word is spoken and it is the images and flesh which do the speaking. It is amazing how Franco is able to use naked bodies in a way that communicate something beyond the traditional confines of nudity and sex.

There is a powerful mood to the film created by some truly beautiful locations, evocative music and the sheer eccentricity of its major characters. Ajit Wilson as Tara and Obongo is a tall, beauty dark skinned woman who was a famous transsexual porn star. She has a certain gender variance which gives the film an eccentric feel, she is both very beautiful and a little disconcerting.

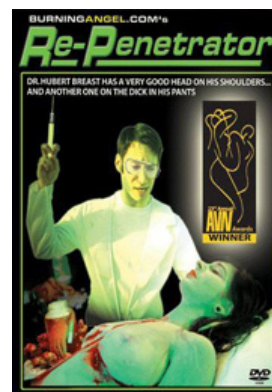
Lina Romay who plays Alice is a stunning blonde and the juxtaposition of the tall dark skinned beauty and the short voluptuous blonde works well throughout the film. Both spend most of their time out of their clothes and even when dressed show off their bodies as much as possible.

Macumba Sexual is brimming with nudity, eroticism and sex. It is certainly explicit and at times borders on hard-core but never becomes a simple porn film. I

It is a textured surreal exploration of voodoo and sexuality and creates an pervasive mood and atmosphere. Photographed in Techniscope by Juan Soler off the coast of Spain on the island of Gran Canaria it is visually stunning. Filled with eroticism and sex. Brimming with dreams, nightmares and visions. It is a very unusual experience.

Re-Penetrator Burning Angel Films R1 DVD (E)

Re-Penetrator won the 2006 AVN Award Winner for Most Outrageous Sex Scene and it is not surprising when you see the film. Directed by Doug Sakmann it is a XXX spoof of the Brian Yuzna's 80's horror flick *Re-Animator* which was in turn based on the work of H.P. Lovecraft.



The film is the story of a stripper (Joanna Angel), who after being dead for twenty years, is resurrected by a perverted mad scientist, Dr. Hubert Breast (Tommy Pistol).

Lucky for Hubert, the stripper is perfectly preserved and so when he vaginally injects her with the glowing green re-agent he hopes she will return will something other than "brains" on her mind. You see he doesn't want a zombie or worse, a Frankenstein creature, he wants a re-animated pleasure creature. After he injects her with the potion, she awakens, screams "Balls" and grabs the doctors ole' fella (for some reason he is naked under his medical gown) and they get down to business as the doctor yells "It's Alive".

Of course they are both covered in blood and goo and the film has a very messy look combining horror with lots of sex in various positions. It is actually quite amazing to see such an outrageous gore ridden horror short combined with such wild bonking !

It should be noted that the film is really only a short and clocks in at 20 minutes, but a fun twenty minutes it is !



Re-Penetrator: Horror and Sex

**Carter Stevens'
Collegiates
Feature Film Collection
After Hours Cinema
R1 DVD (E)**

After Hours Cinema presents the first in a series of multi-disc releases dedicated to Carter Stevens, one of the living legends of New York grindhouse filmmaking. Stevens' raunchy, riotous productions never skimp on hard-core action and have earned the director a permanent place in the AVN Hall of Fame (2009).

Each of these new releases have been approved by Carter Stevens himself. Stevens appeared in over 50 adult films (most under the name Steve Mitchell) between 1973 and 1993, and directed about 40 films between 1972 and 1996. He was unusual in that he did not just create the traditional porn "loops" but tried to bring some energy and creativity into the genre.

His first films appeared just after the mass market success of *Deep Throat* (1972) and brought together hard-core action with interesting characters, some degree of plot and even a good sense of humour.

In Sarah's Eyes (1975) for example was based on the fiction of H.P Lovecraft and explored how suppressed sexual desire would begin to sprout forth and take control. It is a surreal and strange film, which is both sexually adventurous and complex. Always inventive, when the home video boom began to take its toll on theatre based adult titles; he became Master Carter Stevens and moved into the field of bondage and S & M.

This collection includes Stevens' breakthrough classics *The Collegiates* (1973) along with *The Hot Oven* (1975), *Mount of Venus* (1975) and *In Sarah's Eyes* (1975). They have been digitally restored from the only remaining film elements.



Group action in *The Collegiates*

The Collegiates focuses on hot and heavy hijinks as a group of horny college students conspire to help their uptight roommate lose her virginity. It stars the legendary Harry Reems in one of his earliest roles and also features Kim Pope and Tanya T. Tickler.



The Hot Oven answers the immortal question What goes on when the delivery boy adds a few erotic ingredients to the sauce they put on the pizza? No matter what topping you like, you're gonna love this deep-dish classic from the cheesy, sleazy imagination of the porn master.

Developed from a script by Wesson Smith, a pseudonym for a friend who later went on to have a career in television, it stars Jamie Gillis and Eric Edwards. Since Stevens was charged with obscenity in November 1974 the film originally gave everyone pseudonyms ending with Jones or Smith !

Mount of Venus: If Greek mythology bored you in school, time to take a crash course on what really happened on the horny heights of Mount Olympus. A fantasy type adult film with an outrageous sense of humour, it was originally shot under the working title Up the Greek, it starred Georgina Spelvin who had made her name in *The Devil in Miss Jones* so was a real winner. Other members of the all-star cast included Jamie Gillis and Eric Edwards.

In Sarah's Eyes is probably the weirdest of Stevens' films, based on H.P Lovecraft, it is complex, plot driven and surreal. It is certainly hard-core but offers a very creative and intriguing tale. Sarah might be unable to satisfy her erotic desires, but wait until you see what's happening inside her imagination, a lesson on the danger on suppressed desire. Starring Carter Stevens, Lauraine Alraune with a special guest appearance by the notorious larger than life Marc Stevens.



42nd Street Pete's Sleazy Grindhouse Picture Show (2009)
After Hours Cinema
R1 DVD

Pete, known as 42P, has one major love in his life – the sleazy films of the 70s. These films were churned out by the hundreds. They were generally short and featured minimal acting or dialogue (it's hard to speak with your mouth full). The bulk of the film was shot indoors with occasional stock footage street scenes to set the location. Plot was largely irrelevant and the action in each film was fairly conventional once they got down to it. The early "loops", short porn films on a single Super 8 reel, were intended for home use. The Grindhouse films were meant for the backstreet theatres of places like New York's Times Square so they were longer and better filmed..

Although their artistic value is unquestioned (there isn't any) their place in film history is important. Grindhouse took film erotica into the cinema mainstream by the back door and led to the production of better quality films like *The Devil In Miss Jones* and *Debbie Does Dallas*. Many foreign imports exposed viewers to film from countries where there appeared to be no sexual hang-ups about this sort of thing. The viewing public no longer accepted being told what they could watch. Eventually the better films were issued on videotape and by the 90s

Grindhouse all but disappeared. Or did it?

42nd Street Pete has rescued some of these films from obscurity and reissued them on DVD. This set contains four typical films on two DVDs and gives an excellent idea of the genre.

These days they would at best be regarded as quaint, but you can still see what the attraction would have been for the dirty raincoat brigade back in the 70s. The actors and actresses are completely natural about what they are doing and there is a notable lack of silicone. There is an abundance of pubic hair and a lack of that superficial plastic-looking gloss prevalent in current porn actresses.

Grindhouse reflects the changing attitudes to sex during this period. These attitudes led to the inclusion of more erotica in mainstream film as it came to more closely mirror real life. It also split off in another direction to lead to the multi-million dollar adult industry of today.

A characteristic of the Grindhouse cinemas was that they just kept on rolling film after film throughout the day. Peter has included "Grind It!", a function that keeps repeating the films just as the theatres did.

We should be grateful to Pete for his selfless sacrifice in bringing these films to us. It can't be easy having to watch porn day after day but that's what Pete has done for us. Well done.



Pete



Another day at the office!

**Obscene House
Something Weird
Video
DVD-R and
Download**



Obscene House is a classic example of 1969 erotica. It is essentially the story of a cat-house or brothel in action with a jazzy sixties music score and a very bizarre commentary which is laden with double-entendre. Fat Mama is the 400 pound madam who has a pixie hairdo and a colourful, if not gaudy dress which is way too short. Thank god she doesn't bend over. Her cat-house has four lovely girls and is suitably named The Obscene House.

The constant commentary is strange attempt at humour, presented in a semi-business like tone it explains the basis of the business and how these girls are the future leaders of the industry. Before the customers arrive the girls must make themselves presentable as well as helping each other loosen up. The girl-on-girl action is some of the least credible I have ever seen ! It is truly hysterical. In one scene the girl cannot even bring herself to lick the other girl and runs her tongue a good inch in the air above her body, somehow this is enough to throw her partner into fits of orgasmic frenzy.

We then learn the procedures for when a gentleman arrives. Step 1: The john sits on the living room couch and has a drink with Big Mama who very expertly checks how much scotch she gives him.

Step 2: Roll call of the available girls who line up for inspection as the wide-eyed john makes his selection.

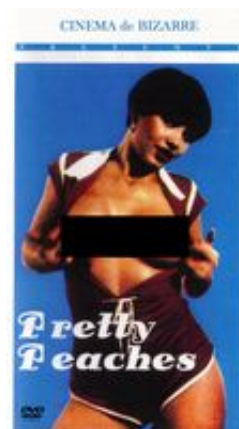
Step 3: Payment in cash which Fat Mama quickly stuffs into her very large bra.

Step 4: Rumpy pumpy with Big Mama regularly getting her jollies by checking in on her girls. Of course this is never shown on screen, there is a bubble bath, finger sucking, one lucky gents gets her belly licked, while we see the legs of one of the girls intertwined with a customer. That's about it.

This is a quaint and funny film from the Sixties which shows how much adult films have come over the last forty years. It is a curious oddity from a time long past and fun to watch.

Web: <http://www.somethingweird.com>

**Pretty Peaches (1978)
DVD-R (E)
Cinema de Bizarre**



Director / Producer / Writer Alex de Renzy was widely known for his quick, rough anal porn flicks. He did over a hundred of these for the grindhouse cinemas. He was at least a competent director and he finally put his skills to use in Pretty Peaches. It was a full length feature with a basic if comprehensible plot, professionally filmed and presented.

He directed the film in a light-hearted manner and this, combined with lead actress Desiree Coustee's total lack of acting skills produced a film that was not so much pornography as a happy little spoof of the genre. It became a classic.

I may be unfair to Desiree Cousteau. It must be admitted that she was a little overweight, had a rather high squeaky voice, and was not strong on acting skills, but her bubbly personality took the edge off what would otherwise have been straight porn. She simply tottered through the film, moaning in despair every time things took a turn for the worse, in her naive innocent (?) way. It was these very qualities that took the film out of the ordinary and gave it appeal to a wider audience. It may have been intended as porn but you couldn't stop laughing at her antics.

The story is about a girl who attends her father's second wedding then drives off while drunk. She has an accident that leaves her with



Exciting moment from Pretty Peaches

amnesia. A couple of lads see the accident and offer to “look after” her until she recovers. Of course they will also take advantage of her at any opportunity, but she resists them. Her efforts to regain her memory and get a job are the bulk of the film. The scene that sticks in everyone’s memory is the one in the public toilet where the boys’ crazy “uncle” tries to help her get her memory back by administering an enema – de Renzy just couldn’t forget his anal obsession. It is probably one of the funniest scenes in this sort of film.

She eventually meets a young “psychiatrist” who tries to help her with slow, gentle sex therapy. She definitely enjoys it so that night he takes her to a local orgy. Her Dad and her new mother are also attending and she finds herself giving her father oral sex. This at least brings back her memory even if it rather surprises Daddy.

There you have it – a lovely film about family values (or something).

The sex scenes were explicit but surprisingly, considering de Renzy’s background, they did not dominate the film. They were simply a part of the plot and this takes the film into erotica rather than porn. The humour takes it more into the area of a spoof or simply an adult comedy.

The film had a short moment of glory then disappeared from the market. Pirate downloads are available but the Cinema de Bizarre version is worth getting because it is probably the best of the taken-from-VHS copies. The picture quality is usable, the sound is poor, and there is one spot where loss of sync leaves us watching a split screen, but otherwise it’s not too bad. Until Cinema de Bizarre get the chance to do a lot of restoration or can get a better original, this is the best copy available of this rare classic.

Web: <http://www.cinema-de-bizarre.com>

**Sleazy Stags,
American Style (2009)
Vintage Erotica
After Hours
Cinema
R1 NTSC (E)**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

In recent months we have been examining the historical rise of film erotica as shown in the different styles of film produced since World War

II. This DVD fills in another gap in the history, that of the “dirty movie” or “stag film” of the 1960s and early 1970s.

These films were generally quickie low-quality productions. They were shot on 8mm film or Super 8 with a handheld camera and lasted about ten minutes – the length of a roll of cine film. Film quality was rarely high, there was no sound, and any pretence at plot was a joke.

At least one of the films in this collection substitutes subtitles for sound with such illuminating comments as “ ahhhhhhhhhhhhh” or ohhhhhhhhhhhhhh”. (I think I spelled that correctly) or even “ring, ring” for the telephone. This is about as high as the production values ever got for this type of film.

Their intention was to titillate men with shots of the typical “girl next door” having sex. They were meant for private home use on the increasing number of film projectors.

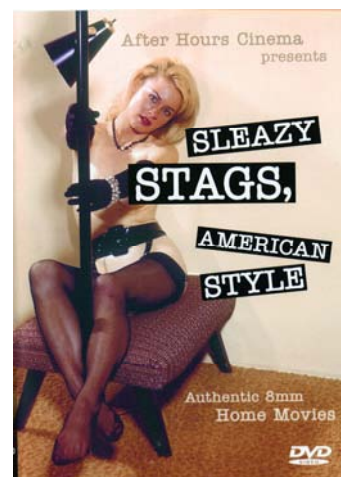
With only ten minutes or less to get it all over with, the plots were very conventional and followed a simple formula:

Get your gear off
She goes down on him
He goes down on her
Penetration in full detail
Money shot.

It was hardly a genre with which to launch a film career, and indeed most of the actors and actresses were amateurs doing a couple of quick films for some ready money.

It was about as low as the erotica genre got. With the tremendous rise in home videotape machines a decade or so later the production values improved. No longer limited to short film reels, videotapes allowed professional producers to enter the market with higher film quality, sound and traditional values like plot.

The stag film simply faded away, a piece of film history that was mentioned occasionally but





What is she doing with a traffic cone ?

rarely seen. As it says on the cover, "Once thought lost, these unique examples of American erotic cinema have been popping up in garages and shoe boxes across the country. "

The quality of the films is poor, with many scratches and a lot of graininess. I doubt they could have cleaned up much better. The sound track is simply a noisy "projector" that sounds more like a Volkswagen.

In spite of these defects they are typical of the genre and After Hours Cinema is to be complimented for resurrecting the films for us.

Slutty Stewardesses
1975 – 1976 (E)
After Hours
Cinema
R1 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



This DVD includes two early porn films of the type classified as "stag movies". These were low-budget (VERY low) quickie knockoffs to fill the growing home market. Although they would have been the height of raunchiness in their time, now they would be better classified as "quaint". Yet they are important in the erotica genre because they are examples of the type of film being produced at the time for the private market as it matured into modern cinema.

"Grindhouse" was an American term for the sleazy theatres trying to keep up their flagging audiences by showing pornos, other exploita-



Scenes from Slutty Stewardesses

tion movies and special interest films like Kung Fu. Audiences were moving away from theatres as television increased its market penetration.

TV shows were very bland and unadventurous so there was a gap in the market for stag movies for home and grindhouse showing. Many homes in newly-rich America could now afford home projection equipment so these films were widely circulated. With the development of videotape they were quickly transferred to the new media and their circulation increased.

I saw quite a few of these in my earlier days (purely in the interests of research, you understand) and they were all much the same. They had improved from the five-minute quickie "roll around on the bed for a while" peepshow films of World War II to something that at least had a minimal plot. The plot was never allowed to get in the way of the action. The films were of fairly decent quality, but their low budget origins were evident in the fact that most were shot in only one or two locations (usually bedrooms). The plots could be summarised as "Oh hello. Let's screw".

Penetration and money shots were compulsory, but the cinematography wasn't as clinical or the women as well groomed and artificial as in the later XXX films. There is a subtly dated look to the films, mostly to do with the costuming and hairdos.

The two films on this DVD are *In-Flight Service* (1975) and *Come With Me My Love* (1976). Charles Lamont directed *In-Flight Service*, which is about a party thrown by airline hostesses one Halloween. *Come With Me My Love* (1976) is a Doris Wishman story about the ghost of a man who was shot by a jealous husband many years ago. Every time the girl who currently occupies the flat brings home a boyfriend the ghost kills him. It features the legendary Annie Sprinkles. It is a little unusual in

that it has “special effects” – the ghost is shown in negative. Wow.

The films are very low quality, reflecting the heavy use and circulation of the originals. There are lines through the film, the sound is tinny and full of crackles and everything jumps occasionally – just the way I remember them. Since some of the effects continue through the modern title screen they may have been enhanced just a little for effect. No doubt the films could be carefully filtered and improved, but I think the original look just sets the period and adds that nice touch of sleaze that is so appropriate.

They are not in themselves great works of art but they do show an important segment of the development of erotica in cinema.

Sex World (1978)
Essex Pictures
Company
Vintage Erotica
(E)

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Anthony Spinelli's *Sex World* was a classic X-rated film of its time. It explored areas of fetish and erotica that many filmmakers would not touch. The young lady who is afraid of commitment, the couple struggling with sex in their marriage because of his repressed memories of his mother, the cocky racist bigot, and the frustrated bi-woman with unsatisfied lesbian tendencies – these were themes that rarely appeared even in blatantly pornographic films. Even interracial sex was uncommon. Everyone has their hang-ups or preferences and it is up to *Sex World* to discover these and to satisfy or relieve them.

It was a take-off of *WestWorld*, a film about a robot amusement park where a guest could indulge his wildest fantasies with the robots – until the robot gunslinger went berserk and started killing people.

Sex World is a retreat where men and women can work off their sexual fantasies and frustrations (supposedly with compliant robots, although this is only implied, never stated). Where Spinelli excelled was in making believable characters with believable problems that *Sex World*



An inter-racial encounter from *Sex World*

would then help them work through. This was at a time when traditional filmmaking values still meant something, even in the X-rated genre. There is some superb acting to build these characters and even touches of bittersweet comedy. “Names” such as John Leslie, Sharon Thorpe, Annette Haven and Desiree West gave the film a quality far above the quickie pornos of the time and the ten-minute stag films of only a few years earlier.

The sex scenes themselves are fairly conventional by today's standards. It was the situations and the characters that made the film better than average, and the sympathetic treatment of the personal problems.

As far as I am aware the film is not currently available on DVD. This is a pity as it is a classic that deserves a rerun to show what could be produced in the genre before they degenerated to skin flicks.



A Lesbian encounter from *Sex World*

PINK CINEMA

What is a Pink Film you may ask. Pink Films or Pink Eiga is a unique form of Japanese soft erotica. It is very different from what we experience as "adult" titles in the west. It is not explicit pornography nor the purely for titillation soft-core of the US market, it is marked by a unique sense of style, high quality cinematography and intriguing and unusual themes. Compared to the current trends in erotica from the US, Pink Films are a breadth of fresh air filled with innovation, unusual themes, social commentary and a great sense of humour.

The first Pink Films appeared in the early 1960s and they flooded the Japanese domestic cinema market right through to the mid-1980s. The original Sixties films were primarily the product of indie studios, with major studios only moving in during the Seventies and Eighties. Obviously the advent of more explicit films from the late Eighties onwards has had some effect on the genre, but there is still enough that makes it a unique genre that many are still produced today. Indeed in 2008 alone there were 80 new Pink films released.

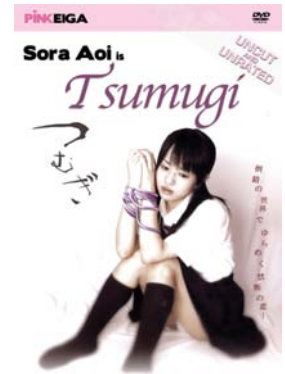
Pink Films have a strict set of rules which in many ways make them very unusual in the history of erotic films. According to famed Japanese film and cultural historians Donald Richie and Pia Harritz the four fundamental elements that constitute a Pink Eiga are:

1. The film must have the requisite number of sex scenes (typically a minimum of five).
2. The film must be approximately one hour in length (perfect for the Pink Eiga triple-bill format).
3. It must be shot on 35 mm film (or occasionally 16mm) in a week and finished within one month.
4. The film must be completed within an extremely limited budget (around \$35,000 US).

Sadly Pink Films were not especially well represented in the western market until the appearance of Pink Eiga (<http://www.pinkeiga.com>) on the market. Pink Eiga has released a range of unusual and challenging Pink titles with lots more on the way so we thought we would focus in on a range of their titles.

Tsumugi: Special Edition Region 0 (Worldwide) Pink Eiga (M)

Tsumugi aka Seifuku bisyojo sensei atashi wo daite is a classic example of a high quality Japanese Pink Film, directed by Hidekazu Takahara who is known in the west for *Zero Woman: Dangerous Game* (1998)



In *Tsumugi* the striking and beautiful Aoi Sola plays the central character, a young and sexually precocious teenager who seduces her teacher, Katagiri. However, life is never as simple as it seems because the married Katagiri is already in a relationship with another teacher Yoko. Katagiri ends up having some sort of mid life crisis and falls for Tsumugi as she makes him feel young again, even though his wife is in the hospital about to have a baby. He works hard to keep both Yoko and Tsumugi happy but things begin to get complicated.

But Tsumugi cannot be easily tied down, she is exploring her sexuality and enjoying the freedom that entails. While she likes the older and more experienced Katagiri, she also takes a liking to Kosuke, a younger and less sexually experienced schoolmate.

We also met a punk rocker friend of Katagiri who also experiences a life lesson which provides an interesting twist to the film.



Aoi Sola in Tsumugi

Of course, all these entanglements soon become difficult, especially as Yoko, who is actually in love with Katagiri, discovers the passionate love affair between Tsumugi and Katagiri and she is not pleased at all, to say the least.

The surprising thing about *Tsumugi* is how well the film is made. When you think of erotica you don't immediately think of plot, characters and cinematography but that is what you get. Sure, let's not forget there is lots of sex and beautiful bodies, but there is also a real exploration of that unique sexual awakening that occurs in the teen years, it is insightful, moving and intensely erotic at the same time. Katagiri also offers superb insight into that middle age period when life has become a little too predictable and you want something exciting, even if you know on some level that it cannot last and will all end in tears!

Since Sora Aoi is a major Japanese media personality, nude model, and star of erotic film, Pink Eiga has really loaded the DVD with a swag of extras including:

Hidekazu Takahara's Director's Notes, Production Diaries: Making *Tsumugi*, *Tsumugi International Movie Trailers*, Cast and Crew Biographies and Filmographies, Still Image Slideshows, Sora Aoi *Tsumugi Photo Albums*, the original Japanese Movie Poster, Dread Nought Music Videos and Sneak Peeks: More Pink Eiga Trailers. There are also some superb featurettes: "Blue Skies, Pink Days", "Naked Confessions" and "One Night with Sora Aoi".

Sexy Battle Girls Pink Eiga All Region NTSC (E)

Sexy Battle Girls is a bizarre and unusual "pink cinema" title from Pink Eiga. This is the very first time it has been available with English subtitles and is a true gem of bizarre cinema. It has been released uncut and unrated in 16 x 9 widescreen in Japanese with very clear English subtitles.

The film opens with a young girl called Mirai about to give up her virginity, as the rather Seventies sounding music plays and the love-play increases in intensity you have a feeling something is about to go wrong and it certainly does;



"I break fruit" in *Sexy Battle Girls*

as her lover takes the next logical step his penis is squashed by her vagina. That's right folks; she has a unique weapon down below, a Venus Crush. It seems she has been in training all of her life to take revenge against the man who took away her mother when she was a child. The truth of the matter is that her father just could not compete in the dick department and her mother went with the man with the biggest "tool". Mirai has spent her early life crushing bananas, apples and eggs in preparation for the day that her "weapon" can be put to use and save her families good name. This is certainly an outrageous beginning to the film and things just get better as the plot unfolds.

Okay, I have to agree that the plot to the film is ludicrous, but the sheer audacity of the story and the fetishism of the film creates a highly erotic and intensely amusing experience. So overlook the silliness of it all and go along for the ride !

Mirai Asamiya enrolls in a new school where the sleazy looking headmaster is the man who took



The bizarre chastity belt in *Sexy Battle Girls*

her mother away with his large member. He also runs a prostitution ring, grooming failing students as sex slaves for local politicians and wealthy patrons, as we get to see on numerous occasions including the most explicit section of the film.

These more explicit scenes have been filmed with a strange and quirky level of humour. I have never seen a sex scene which borders on XXX and yet uses what is clearly a rubber penis pump in place of a penis to give the whole scene a funny even laugh-out-loud feel.

As Mirai tries to survive in the new school she finds that many of the other girls are out to get her. There are catfights aplenty with "ninja pens", "dildo weapons" and lots more; never mind the whippings the headmaster gives out when you don't live up to the school rules. Soon it becomes clear she must fulfil her mission and so with her Venus Crush now liberated from its chastity belt she prepares to take on the headmaster's lesbian leather daughter and then the "large-membered" headmaster himself !

This is an unusual pink film, the sex is explicit but not "XXX", in place of organs are various dildos and appliances so that the action actually seems more explicit than it really is and has an element of play to it. So while there is plenty of erotic activity with lots of breasts and ass on show, there is little actually which crosses the line, unless you are challenged by fetish and *Sexy Battle Girls* is filled with fetish; whips, chains, sex toys and lots more.

This is a very fun and entertaining film, it is filled with erotica; catfights, quirky sex scenes and a great sense of humour which makes it all seem so playful. I loved it.

S & M Hunter
Pink Eiga
All Region NTSC (M)

S & M Hunter is a superb example of what is known as Japanese Pink Cinema, essentially unusual and witty sex films (most of which could be defined as soft-core) made by independent studios. It is probably best described as a mixture of live action Hentai (literally adult or sex Anime) and a Western ! It has a real Manga feel, especially in it's over the top and



The S & M Hunter: good with a rope

otherworldly plot. It was made in 1986 by Shuji Kataoka and is a very outrageous experience.

The film opens on the "Pleasure Dungeon" a semi religious sex club where every desire can be met. The members are dressed as monks and nuns except for the "Hunter" who is a cowboy priest ! We are giving an opening spiel about the Dungeon and the pleasures it offers as well as to whom they tend to appeal. This is a fun and witty introduction with such insights as most sadists are accountants and most drag queens are athletes (especially footballers since they are all gay !). This heralds the politically incorrect humour which continues throughout the film.

Joe arrives and makes his choice and after some good hard sadism on Maria who is dressed as a nun, seems more than a little unsatisfied. The Dungeon Master being attuned to the desires of others, sees in his eyes that he is not really into the sort of "games" on offer and asks Joe what he really needs. The Dungeon is then lit up as the S & M Hunter enters, a true woman "tamer", who shows Joe his stuff by subjecting Maria to a rope tying she will never forget. It seems there are various types of erotic rope work including Shinju (breast binding), Sukaranbo (which focuses on the vagina) and Karada (a whole body technique), the S & M Hunter is a master of them all !

We soon learn the Joe is actually gay and his lover is being held captive by a group of angry woman called The Bombers. Each day they are taking advantage of him and we see the poor boy forced to indulge in all sorts of sexual activity he would rather avoid ! The S & M Hunter





Meg as a Nazi warrior battles the S & M Hunter

takes on the job and he frees Jack by subjecting each of the women to various rope tortures – one is tied in a net with a carefully placed vibrator, the other locked in a gigantic spider web of rope.

However, things don't go quite as planned, while he has freed Jack (to Joes very obvious satisfaction) and has seduced the gang's leader Machi with some especially persuasive rope work, a figure from his past returns and a show-down is on the cards.

Meg castigates the girls for allowing a man to get the better of them and dressing herself in a Nazi uniform under a swastika flag, heads off to confront and destroy her adversary.

The final battle is brutal indeed and the S & M Hunter is blinded, but that does not stop him. He ties Meg to a truck and hoists her into the air where she is finally forced to give in to the pleasure of his ropes and his manhood.

This is a truly outrageous film, filled to the very brim with eroticism, political incorrectness, humour and the strangest plot you could ever imagine.

At the same time it works on many levels – it is sexy, funny and entertaining, the various elements are all brought together to create one of the most eccentric pieces of cinema you will see in a long time. I loved it, indeed, I think I will go and watch it again now !

The DVD from Pink Eiga offers a high quality widescreen print with Japanese language and clear English subtitles. There are also various biographies and filmographies and some trailers.



Daughter in Law as Cow in A Lonely Cow Weeps at Dawn (Pink Eiga)

**A Lonely Cow Weeps at Dawn
Pink Eiga
All Region NTSC (M)**

Pink Cinema is always innovative and challenging and can range from the playful and downright bizarre to the touching and moving.



Daisuke Goto is a well-respected Japanese Pink cinema director and produced a range of unusual films including two Zero Woman S & M titles and *Roman Porno Bed Partner* (1988) among many others. This film is very different and explores territory not every seen before in any sort of erotica.

A Lonely Cow Weeps at Dawn aka *Cowshed of Immorality* (2003) is not simply a pink film but one marked by character development, realistic cinematography and moody slow pacing. There is enough here to keep a watcher of world cinema intrigued while also moving into much stranger pastures.

The film is about a sad, aging and clearly senile old fellow called Shukichi who is living at the edge of sanity. He is under constant pressure from property developers to sell his land but it is all he had and he will not sell. One of his prize possessions is his cow Hanako (in the Pink Eiga US release she is called Bessie), when she dies his daughter in law decides to take rather unusual and drastic measures.

She strips naked and takes the place of the cow. It is hard to explain how bizarre the scene looks when you first see the dear old man go to the shed and there in the dirt and shit is a wom-

an with her rump showing to the world. Shukichi gives her a nice little pat and says good morning and then goes to work milking while she issues forth cow noises ! As time progresses, however, things get a little closer than we may first suspect.

Here is film which is reflecting on the sad lot of farmers, the evils of land developers and the senility of old age by having an old man milk his daughter in law.

The film even includes melancholic flashbacks of the cow's demise and the emotional connection between Shukichi and his prize milker. Of course things do not go well when Shukichi's daughter discovers their unusual arrangement and tries to put an end to it.

Don't be fooled however, this is a pink film and there are all sorts of unusual sex scenes, nudity and passion, including a subplot with a explicit portrayal of a relationship between a senior doctor and his much younger nurse, but it is more erotic than exploitative in my mind.

I must admit I found this an extremely unusual world of cinema, quirky, intriguing and amusing. It shows the sheer audacity and innovative nature of Pink Cinema and is highly recommended.

Blind Love **Pink Eiga** **All Region NTSC (M)**

Daisuke Goto has followed *A Lonely Cow Weeps at Dawn* with an Equally unusual Pink film *Blind Love*. It won a Silver Medal at the 2005 Pink Eiga Awards and was an official selection at the 2009 New York Asian Film Festival.



In this film Goto continues his adventures in Pink cinema but he takes a route very different from that of most other Pink cinema directors. While he fills his films with nudity, quite explicit sex and eroticism, he places a strong emphasis on character development and social interactions. Goto likes to take a small group of individuals and explore the sexual and emotional dynamics between them.

In *Blind Love* they are a strange and divergent



Kati Daisuke and his Dummy

group which includes Daisuke who is convinced his work as a ventriloquist has relevance in a world that no longer seems interested in what he does. Yoichi, his assistant, Hikari the love interest and her friend Luna.

Kato Daisuke (Shota Kotaki) is a struggling ventriloquist who seems to live in a dream world. He is convinced of the artistic merit of his performances while audiences find his act boring and children cry at the strange jokes he performs with his dummy. However one person is impressed, her name is Hikari (Konatsu), and she loves the sound of his voice, she also is blind.

When she visits Daisuke's to bring him flowers she confuses his assistant Yoichi (Yota Kawase) for him. Slowly a very strange love triangle develops; she loves the voice of Daisuke and the touch of Yoichi, so things get very weird.

The film includes all sorts of unusual scenes as Yochi enjoys developing a relationship with



Hikari, the love interest in Blind Love

Hikari but with Daisuke present all the time, you can get the drift of where this is all going.

While this is a challenging and intriguing film, there is a strange imbalance in the plot in that while it explores a very unusual form of love triangle the story is punctuated by attempts at humour which do not work especially well. Other characters do add some texture to the tale especially Luna, Hikari's friend who services businessmen to pay her bills. Some reviewers have felt the sex takes away from the tale but I feel this shows a lack of appreciation for the unique nature of Pink Cinema. Pink Cinema uses sex, nudity and eroticism as part of larger tale and in *Blind Love*, once again, I think Goto has done so successfully.

Pink Eiga has stacked on the extras with this title. There is an Introduction to *Blind Love* followed by a Q & A with the director from the New York Asian Film Festival. There is quite a comprehensive interview with Daisuke Goto and a further interview with Cinematographer Masahide Iioka. There is also an audio commentary with Daisuke Goto and Masahide Iioka.

**Groper Train:
Search for the Black
Pearl**
Pink Eiga
All Region NTSC (M)

Groper Train: Search for the Black Pearl aka *Chikan densha: Shitagi kensatsu* is an unusual work of pink cinema, combining a strong dose of eroticism and sex with a bizarre private eye story. Every country has its sexual quirks but one of the more unusual is the Japanese fetish for groping on a crowded train. The fetish ranges from fondling some ass to even having anonymous sex on the long journeys that the Japanese take on very overcrowded trains where people are pushed together like sardines. In Japan the issue of train groping has become quite serious and hence these films walk a fine line between dark humour, fantasy and trivializing a serious issue.

There has been quite a tradition of Groper films, *Groper Train: Search for the Black Pearl* is the 23rd film in the Groper Train series of films and the sixth under Yojiro Takita's helm.



In 1934 Gohei Yamamori is the sole survivor of the Japanese Army Unit 69. He discovers Zhang Zuolin's black pearl ring, a ring famed for causing the Manchurian Incident and starting a war between Japan and China. Years later, Gohei is at death's door and his wife knows he has hidden the two million dollar black pearl. As he gives her a final screw, she asks where the pearl is hidden and he whispers the phrase *pussy print*. Now there is actually a ink picture hanging on the wall behind him of a vagina, but it is only half the story. Accordingly she hires a private detective named Ippei Kuroda and his assistant Hamako to find the girl with the girl with the matching pussy. How does Ippei find the right one? Well he puts on a gas mask and travels every train in Tokyo pussy printing young girls!

Even when they find the right girl (and the right pussy) things don't get any easier and they call in the famous mystery writer Seicho Matsuki to unravel the mystery. Through sexual high-jinks and double-crosses, the pearl is finally discovered and it's closer than everyone thinks. But to get the pearl will take some muscle control!

This is certainly a strange and wonderful film combining a detective tale with sex, eroticism, nudity and a great sense of humour. While the key fantasy of groping someone on a crowded train may be specifically a Japanese phenomenon, it does have a certain universal appeal.



Finding Pussy Prints

**42nd Street Pete's
Hitler's Harlots
Collection (E)
After Hours Cinema
R0 DVD**

Nazisploitation is a unique form of exploitation which uses the historical imagery of WWII to create superbly perverse fetish cinema. It ranges from films such as *Ilsa*, *She Wolf of the S.S.* which primarily place the emphasis on violence with the portrayal of sex focusing on fetish (with little actually hard-core action) to explicit hard-core S.S. style bondage films and everything in-between.

This superbly sleazy collection offers an outstanding range of hard-core sex and fetish content from within this genre, indeed there are over three hours of cinema; you will certainly need a shower after this lot.

The DVD opens with an overview of Nazi imagery in cinema, exploitation cinema and Nazi imagery in sex films, 42nd Street Pete certainly knows his movies and offers a quick but comprehensive intro to the genre mentioning everything from *Hogan's Heroes* to *Mein Kunt*.

I just love the various intros by 42nd Street Pete it adds a truly hilarious feel to the whole sleazy proceedings. He even offers insights to each of the loops and there is a great trailer collection.

The main attraction is *Hitler's Harlot* which dates from 1973. It opens with a pretence of history and then moves quickly into hard-core sex and exploitation, all accompanied to a rousing Nazi music score !

Three whimpering frauleins and one male are rounded up for interrogation by a horny S.S. type dominatrix and her rather moronic but well



Ilsa like Nazi character from Hitler's Harlots

hung assistant Karl. Together they aim to get information about local resistance fighters by any means possible. While many may use straight forward torture, these two have a liking for kinky sex so we know we are in for a wild ride.

When our dominatrix is not doing her thing, there is more than enough time for Karl to get his end in and for other forms of sexual domination. It's all here; pain, degradation and domination as well as blowjobs, cum scenes, loads of lesbian sex and the creative use of a baton !

To round out the package there are 13 different porn loops, many of which have prisoner and Nazisploitation themes, others which are simply unusual Seventies sex loops. These are a mixed bunch, but are certainly lots of fun.

They range from the *Mein Kunt* series which are short prisoner type sex films to the rather fun *In the Name of Odin* which presents a Viking bonkfest. These date from throughout the Seventies.

The package includes excellent descriptive linear notes and a rather nice poster.



Fantom Killer Four
Teraz Films
NTSC All Regions
(E)

Fantom Killer Four is an extreme erotic horror; it is an example of the type of film wowers get all hot and bothered about screaming for tighter controls and other such bullshit.



In my mind, however, *Fantom Killer Four* is a "case study" in the argument that adult cinema is just another form of entertainment with actors playing various roles, some of which are explicitly sexual, others which are not. *Fantom Killer Four* just takes things one step further by offering an unusual combination of explicit sex, horror, violence and gore. In many ways it is a plot driven detective/serial killer film with "sado erotic" set pieces of various forms.

A young naked hooker picks up a young man for a good time; however, when he turns nasty by anally raping her she takes her revenge by removing his penis with a blade she keeps stored in her nether regions for just such an occasion. Soon Detective Sylvia Kovak is called to investigate the crime but strange things begin to occur.

One by one her friends are assaulted and killed in extreme and perverse ways and let's be clear these scenes are surprising effective and well done. Soon Kovak realizes that the Fantom killer is stalking her and without any assistance from her superiors she throws herself headlong into the case.

Kovak uses every trick in the book to try and catch the killer including her brains and beautiful body, however in the end she is degraded by



Washing scene from Fantom Killer 4

the force she works for and out manoeuvred by the killer and he is free to star in another sequel !

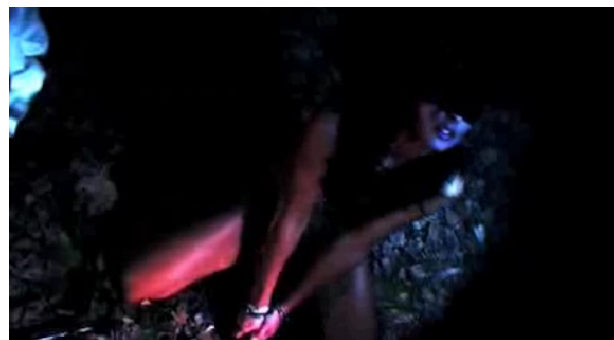
The first thing you notice about this film is its sheer audacity, it is willing to go where other films do not and create an intensity of erotic horror which is rather impressive. Yes this is a low budget film with average acting and some strong "accents" but the creativity of the plot, score and "erotic set pieces" sets this film apart from many others. The content is extreme; it combines sex, fetish, violence and "sadistic fantasy" into a package which is actually very top-notch.

The "set pieces" which are shown throughout the film are marked by an excellent knowledge of cinematography and are very creative. There are scenes of wild abandon such as when the killer uses the detective as a paintbrush while in the next room a nympho police-woman uses a severed penis to pleasure herself; priceless!

At the same time some of the "sado erotic" scenes are powerful and represent a refinement of the depiction of BDSM. Examples include such memorable set-pieces as the petrol trap, the pistol gun scene and the washing and garbage scene. When the senior detective whips Kovak's arse with a flyswat is both erotic and hilarious at the same time !

There is a lot that can be said about this film, it is innovative, daring and creative. It has an intensity not seen in many other sex films as it crosses the genre boundaries in a way not often depicted. It would be way too easy to simply try and write off this film as just another "adult" film, it is a lot more than that. Its creative mix of all manner of sex, fetish and extreme fantasy makes it a fascinating work of cinema. This is exploitation take to a new level !

Web: <http://www.terazfilms.co.uk/>



Policewoman tricked from Fantom Killer 4

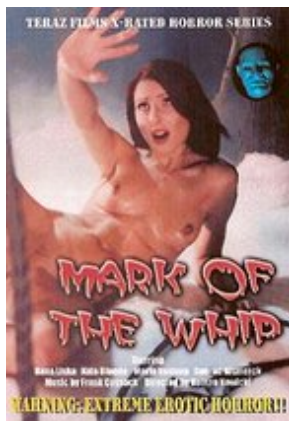
Mark of the Whip
Teraz Films
NTSC All Regions
(E)

"...the huge bullwhip strikes at her naked, sweat soaked body, wrapping itself around her stomach like a venomous snake. The stinging pain shoots through her. She can hardly catch her breath before she feels the next strike. Carla watches herself in the carefully placed mirror. She sees the tell-tale red marks across her beautiful out-stretched body. She is slowly being broken. She feels aroused, ashamed and humiliated but still she can't stop looking at herself in the mirror..."

When Sylvia's car breaks down in a dark country lane, she soon finds herself surrounded by a bunch of inbred woodland peasants who want to take advantage of her. She sees them off and runs into the wood, but soon they catch up with her and extract a humiliating punishment. She is whipped, stripped naked and whipped again and then whipped some more until she achieves a rather mighty orgasm. At first the peasants seem to be the culprits but then a strange dark character arrives with a real sense of menace, he is the Fantom Whipper.

Sylvia is now in hospital tied to a bed and gagged, she has become addicted to whipping and will punish herself if left unattended. Detective Lucie Novak is sent to investigate this outrageous crime only to find herself drawn into a masochistic world of pain and pleasure orchestrated by the enigmatic Fantom Whipper.

After experienced a long and prolonged whipping and a creative exploration with a whip handle by the Whipper, she becomes hopelessly addicted to the pleasures of the lash. In her new submissive role she agrees do anything for her new found master as long as she can achieve



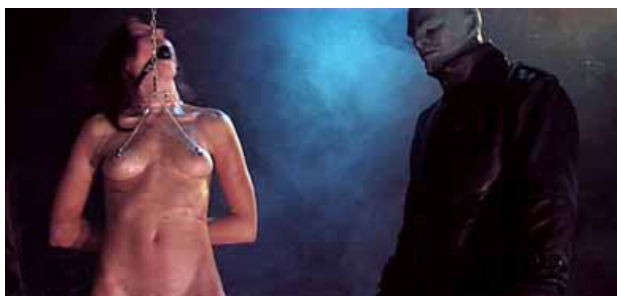
Hana Liska in Mark of the Whip

another intense orgasm from his merciless bullwhip. It seems once you have tasted the pleasures of the whip, nothing else will suffice.

When she is found tied, naked and beaten in the forest, her superiors are none too pleased and she is discharged from the police force. Soon she makes friends with the sophisticated Maria Markovska and together they discover their mutual interest.

Mark of the Whip is a stylized and beautiful filmed exploration of pleasure and pain. It is filled to the brim with sex, eroticism and whipping. The bondage and whipping scenes are interspersed with scenes of sensuality, eroticism and explicit sex (including hardcore sex and lesbian scenes) which creates a heady mix of desire and dominance. The careful balancing of sensuality and sex with the sado-erotic makes the film very successful and quite unique. While the acting may be average, the cinematography and score of the film are quite superior and sustain the mood right through the film.

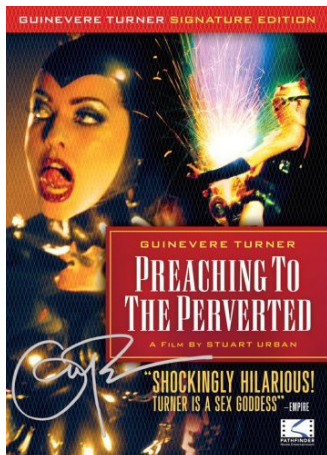
The combination of suspense, sex and sadism makes this a very unusual film; the whippings scenes are prolonged and impressively realistic, offering a powerful and erotic exploration of pleasure and pain. *Mark of the Whip* pushes outside traditional genres and offers an interesting new approach to sex, crime and bondage cinema.



The Fantom Whipper

**Preaching to the
Perverted
Pathfinder Home
Entertainment
R1 DVD**

Preaching to the Perverted is a 1997 British comedy film written and directed by Stuart Urban. The film stars Guinevere Turner who plays Tanya Cheex, a New York dominatrix. Several well-known fetish performance artists appear in the film including the Chaos Clowns, Zos & Kia, Luci The Axle Grinder, Miss Kimberly, the Fetish Nun Suzi Woodroffe and Tutu.



Henry Harding MP is a British member of parliament on a campaign against vice. He hires Peter Emery, the son of his tea lady, who runs a small Christian computer company called Holy Hardware to infiltrate and document the evils of the fetish community. Harding believes he can use England's antiquated 18th century sex laws against the BDSM community. He unites with extreme feminists and starts a media campaign while secretly having Peter infiltrate one of the most public clubs, House of Thwax run by Tanya Cheex.

As Peter becomes involved with the club, secretly filming it's activities, we are introduced to all manner of fetish, BDSM, adult infantilism, human ponies, electro fetish and lots more. There are even my favourite, nuns dressed in latex!

The depiction of the clash between the censorious puritans and the pagan sex community is fairly heavy handed and lack subtlety, but it is



Fantastic Fetish Show Performances



Fetish Nun Suzi Woodroffe

lots of fun. The depiction of the underground fetish clubs is superb with some great bondage footage. As Peter slowly treads the path of fetishism, he becomes taken with Tanya and when forced to give evidence against the club decides to stand for sexual diversity declaring that all the acts of BDSM he filmed were staged and hence not illegal. This lands him in jail for contempt of court, but he comes out a hero, Tanya is pregnant with his child and Harding is exposed for having an affair with his secretary.

The matching of excellent performances all round with a great score and stunning visuals make this a truly memorable film. It is a true celebration of the diversity of sexual experience with some of the very best depictions of England's underground sex clubs scene.



**Shogun's Joy of Torture
(1968)
Cinema De Bizarre
DVD-R**

Shogun's Joy of Torture (1968) aka *Tokugawa on-na keibatsu-shi* directed by Teruo Ishii is a sequence of three short tales, all of which revel in sexual excess and lengthy torture. The film is set within the Edo period and opens with various women being despatched by creative methods including decapitation, torn in twain by animals and being burnt alive.

A title such as *Shogun's Joy of Torture* will, of course, trigger immediate associations with exploitation cinema from the West which focus on Medieval and war atrocities yet in many ways this is a very different sort of film. While certainly packing in the eroticism, fetishism and violence, the presentation is stylized, even refined and has a level of sophistication which is unexpected but very welcome.

The tales are all individually contained but each offer a refinement of themes from the preceding ones developing both concept and character. The first tale is essentially a morality tale which involves rape, blackmail and incest leading to a murder, then torture and death. It is an intriguing story showing how a young woman is manipulated by men, first by a wealthy landowner and then by her brother. Even in death she restores her brother's honour by taking responsibility for their illicit relationship which results in her upside crucifixion and drowning. The first tale concludes with a reflection on the limits of law and how torture does not seem to fit with the nature of justice. This is a key theme which is the backbone of the whole film.

The second tale reflects further on the nature authority with an exploration of monastic sexual



Lesbian Abbess tortures in jealousy



Opening scene from Shogun's Joy of Torture

suppression. We have a lesbian abbess whose jealousy leads to violence, madness and torture including brandings, mutilation and chillies applied to the vagina of a poor screeching nun, not to mention cutting of the head of a monk in passion driven insanity ! The second tale cumulates in a series of misogynist comments by one of the court's torturers and this leads to the third tale. Here we have key themes tied together; torture even when used by legal figures distorting the psyche, the dangers of sexual suppression and the limits of justice.

Each of the stories is marked by superior cinematography, a careful use of erotic and violent content where "less is more" and great storytelling. It is amazing how much of a mood can be created by careful inference rather than explicit "torture gore", while made many years ago this film stands well the test of time and hardly looks dated at all.

The third tale opens with a beautiful Geisha being tattooed, her back is being covered in an unusual design, that of a woman in bondage being tortured. While the tattoo artist is thrilled by his handiwork, the local torturer looks with disdain advising the artist has not captured the look of pain; a unique state of violent excess where ecstasy intervenes. Soon the tattoo artist is travelling with the torturer to explore the nature of suffering and torture. The action here moves into a new direction as Westerners who have entered Japan to spread the pernicious faith of Christianity are given a dose of Japanese justice with all manner of excessive violence. As the violence increase, it becomes clear that the torturer has become addicted to the sadism of his job and themes about torture, repression, violence and justice are explored.

This is quite a fascinating film which is vastly superior to what its title may suggest. It is exploitation certainly, filled with all manner of ou-

tré imagery and content. Yet at the same time it is filled with reflective themes, marvellous set-pieces and complex plots. There is much that is uniquely Japanese in the film in relation to themes relating to the fragility of life, honour and the relationship between justice and violence, this gives it a very special presentation. It is also marked by a seriousness of plot and acting, this is not pitched as a fun exploitation romp, but as a solid Edo historical piece.

Shogun's Joy of Torture is certainly far more professional than films of a similar ilk attempted in the west around the same period and hence is a superb example of high calibre wild world cinema !

Web: <http://Cinema-de-bizarre.com>

**Shogun's Sadism:
Inferno of Torture
Cinema De Bizarre
DVD-R**

Shogun's Sadism: Inferno of Torture (1969) *Tokugawa irezumi-shi: Seme jigoku aka Hell's Tattooers* is a further film within Teruo Ishii's exploration of Japanese eroticism torture, there were some eight in all. Ishii was well known for his eroto-grotesque films and this work, though early, are significant and challenging.

In my mind *Shogun's Sadism: Inferno of Torture* is the most stylish and sophisticated of his "Japanese torture" films; filled with stunning cinematography, superior use of texture, shadow and light and an atmospheric score which even mainstream films would be proud of. The camera angles and slow movement over the subjects creates quite a mesmerizing experience.



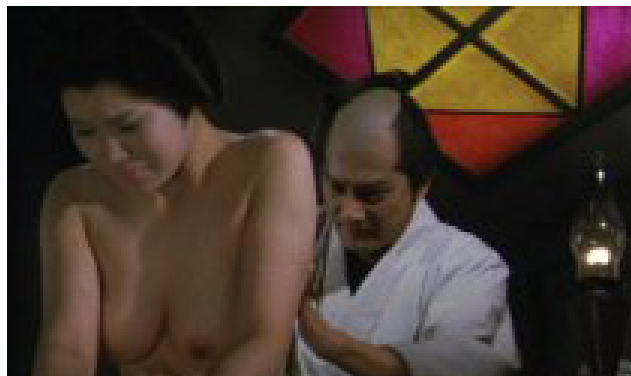
Crucifixion torture

Inferno of Torture does up the fetish stakes on *Shogun's Joys of Torture* (1968), for example there is a stronger emphasis on whippings, rope work and submission. It continues the themes of financial exploitation with a further focus on the seductive quality of the Tattoo. Certainly in this Ishii film the Tattoo is the central motif.

The film opens with a bang, a number of female criminals on crucifixes are knifed to death while three men on the ground have their heads sawed off. The film itself, however, is of the "less is more" school of genre filmmaking and uses violence and torture in a refined and stylized manner. That being said the end where a woman is tied upside down between two bent saplings and the ropes are cut causing her to be split in half down the middle while flying up into the air is a sight to see.

The character development is solid with a range of interesting personalities each telling their stories, while the two rival tattoo artists are the nexus of the tale; subplots are intertwined until the climax is unveiled. This allows a fascinating complex web of themes to be explored and for a two hour film it certainly keeps your attention.

Shogun's Sadism: Inferno of Torture is another unique film from Teruo Ishii which combines exploitation cinema with a refined style, superior cinematography and a reflective plot which explores the nuances of Japanese culture. There is something beautiful about the way he captures the fragility of existence in his films, the fine line between life and death, love and hate, beauty and decay. His whole approach to cinema reminds me of the Japanese Cherry Blossom, which while beautiful only lasts a fraction of a moment and represents that delicate beauty you cannot hold onto and symbolizes for the transient nature of all life.



**Tattooing is a major theme in
Shogun's Sadism**

THE ART OF THE NASTY

The Art of the Nasty
Nigel Wingrove and Marc Morris
FAB Press 2009
Web: <http://www.fabpress.com>

The Art of the Nasty is the most comprehensive exploration of pre-certificated video nasty art every produced. It is impeccably researched with extensive background information on the censorship history of the films in question coupled with an informative and entertaining introduction by Nigel Wingrove of Salvation films. At the same time since this is a book about the art of the Video Nasty, the reproduction of the video sleeves cannot be faulted. It is a beautiful book, from its attention grabbing cover to the colour quality of each of its images.

The authors are highly respected in their fields, Nigel Wingrove as the founder of Salvation Films and anti-censorship campaigner and Marc Morris as an expert in the field of exploitation cinema and operator of Nucleus Films. Originally released in 1998 by Salvation, the book sold out quickly and became quite a rare collector's item. The new edition has been published by FAB Press and is fully revised, updated and expanded.

The introductory essays offer an excellent discussion of the state of censorship in the United



THE ART OF THE NASTY

Nigel Wingrove and Marc Morris

Kingdom and how it developed. There is a thorough overview of the culture which gave birth to the "Video Nasty" controversy and the role the media, moral campaigners such as the truly demented Mary Whitehouse and pressure groups played in the process. I really enjoy Wingrove's marvellously cynical and jaded tone which has obviously developed from a lifetime of dealing with censors and moral puritans trying to control what adults can watch in the privacy of their homes.

The book itself is then divided into various sections exploring the "Video Nasties" which were believed to put the very soul of Britain at risk. For Australians the situation was no better, most of these titles were also banned and many, sadly, continue to be.

The first section is the 39 Films deemed obscene by the Department of Public Persecutions. These wonderful, shocking, weird and shocking films range from *Cannibal Holocaust* to *Faces of Death*, *Bloody Moon* to *The Driller Killer* and *Zombie Flesh Eaters*. Each includes





a succinct summary of the legal and censorship controversies related to each title. The video sleeve art is superbly reproduced with a large image per page and three smaller ones.

The second section is *Nasties on Parole 33 films the DPP (Department of Public Prosecutions) failed to convict*. One could probably add, not from want of trying! There are some fascinating titles here including many significant cult classics from *The Beyond* and Dario Argento's *Inferno* to the delirious madness of *Killer Nun* and even *The Evil Dead*!

The third section celebrates *The Nasties That Got Away* and discusses how these particular Nasties circumvented the process by good management or damn good luck. Titles such as *Act of Vengeance* which simply used a mild cover and hoped for the Best or *Ilsa, Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* which may have escaped since it has Arabic on the cover and didn't look like a British release. *Pink Flamingos*, still banned in Australia, didn't try at all considering its wild content which ranged from a lobster rape to a drag queen eating a real dog shit. It was simply released uncut on an unprepared public by direct mail order from Palace Video.

The fourth and sections *Nice And Sleazy* and *The Good The Bad And The Vomit-Inducing of-*



One of the most controversial scenes in Cannibal Holocaust

fer us a bewildering section of wild and outrageous titles from cult and horror to sex and exploitation, from mondo films to Nazisploitation.

It is a true cavalcade of the bizarre from *Blood Vengeance* to *Confessions of a young American Housewife*, *Devil's Nightmare* to *House of Whipcord*. This is followed by an appendix which lists the various video companies in operation during the Video Nasty period and the pre-cert titles they released.

While the information included comes from a British perspective it is also pertinent to Australia. Australian's censors took their lead from the British and most of the same films were similarly banned and censored here.

However what is most worrying is while there have been changes in Britain post 2000 in regards to both adult films and what were labelled "Video Nasties" this has not happened in Australia.

A large number of the Video Nasties are still banned or only have severely edited editions released in Australia and films such as *Pink Flamingos*, *Salò*, *Caligula* even Herschell G Lewis' *Gore Gore Girls* has been refused classification. Adult titles can technically only be sold in a limited number of states and there is currently no 18+ classification for video games so all adult video games are refused a rating.

The Art of the Nasty is a stunning volume; it is 168 pages in length, illustrated with 450 full colour images and is filled to the brim with all manner of lurid, debauched and outrageous titles, just like we like them!

This is a book that is a absolute must-have for all genre film lovers.

Cinema Sewer Two
Edited by Robin
Bougie
FAB Press 2009

Cinema Sewer is one of my favourite magazines. Hand-written and illustrated; filled to the brim with extreme content, adult films, cult and horror, sleaze and lots more - it takes the depravity of underground film to an artform. The first compilation in book form was published in 2007 and brought together early issues of Cinema Sewer, while Volume Two takes us even further into illicit territory. It covers issues 13-16 of this mind blowing publication, revised, expanded and presented with an additional 90 pages of content.

It is difficult to describe the experience of Cinema Sewer to the "uninitiated"; the whole magazine is a work of art; being presented in hand-written form with comics, cartoons, movie covers and lots more. The content borders from the extremes of adult film, lovingly illustrated with perverse cartoons, to horror and cult classics and rants about everything in-between. It reminds me of the very early days of underground comics and magazines, every page is packed to the edges with rants, reviews, commentary, cartoons, movie posters and memorabilia.

From The Killing of America, the ultra-violent "shockumentary" to Bongwater Butt Babes, a title on which I do not need to comment !

From interviews with such figures as Lee Carroll, the porn star and David Hess to reflections on XXX comics. From the twenty five best movies adapted from a comic book to a retrospective on Dorothy LeMay. From Mommy Put Me in Porn, the story of Athena Star to zillions of movie reviews of titles you will never have heard of and when you see them, will never want to hear of them again. This is a book which is guaranteed to bring a grin to the face of any devoted Cinemaphile.

Cinema Sewer will shock, arouse, titillate and offend. If you are easily disturbed by the discussion and depiction of all manner of bodily functions, then don't bother. But if you want to explore the wildest, sickest and sexiest films in



genre cinema history in the most amusing format possible then Cinema Sewer II is for you.

If you want to get Cinema Sewer issue by issue or see Robin Bougie's other work visit:

Cinema Sewer
<http://www.cinemasewer.com/>

The books are available from FAB Press
FAB Press
Web: <http://www.fabpress.com>

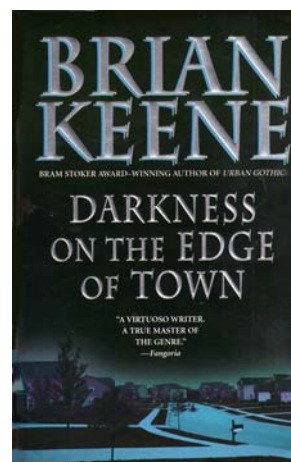
Darkness on the
Edge of Town
Brian Keene
Leisure Books
Dorchester
Publishing (2010)

The little town of Walden wakes up one morning to find that morning hasn't come. It is still dark outside – not the darkness of heavy cloud cover, but a deep, intense darkness that excludes all sound, light and power. Nothing gets past the barrier of darkness that surrounds the town. No rain, no power, no radio, particularly no people.

As the locals set off to work in outside towns they drive into the darkness and disappear forever. From the few who try walking into the darkness, there are a few screams, then nothing. For those still in town it is worse. The darkness is alive. It talks to you in your mind, it shows you illusions of people you loved who died some time ago. It calls you to walk into the darkness and join them.

"Sure, I didn't see them diebut I heard them. Heard them die. I heard their screams. And the other sounds. The sounds the Darkness makes"

Robbie Higgins is not the brightest man in town but he is one of the first to experience the hallucinations and the effect of the Darkness on the human mind. It is malevolent, turning the trapped people against each other. Robbie and a small group of people who live in the same apartment block band together for defence as the town degenerates into lawlessness. The looting starts on the first "day" but people get desperate as they run out of water, food and



fuel. Soon the streets are in a state of anarchy and the death toll from murder, rape and pillage is rising. Many deaths seem completely irrational as the Darkness works on the weaker minds. The only way to survive is to carry a gun and be prepared to use it.

Robbie and his friends try an experiment to see if they can get through the Darkness. It doesn't work and more people are killed. They are trapped in their own apartment building by the crowd whipped up by the dead people's friends and a woman crazed by religion and a belief in witches.

Robbie knows they must get out of the town and escape the Darkness, but he is not even sure if there is anything outside to escape to. Nevertheless he has another plan and the survivors know they must attempt it or die in the town.

The story draws on earlier books like *The Mist*, but Brian Keene skilfully paints a darker picture of desperation and hopelessness. The story seems slow-moving at first but he uses the slow pace to build up the prison-like feeling of being trapped in a place that has lost any humanity. *Darkness* follows on from his earlier books but I don't want to give the plot away. The book stands by itself quite well.

In the genre of post-apocalypse novels, this is one of the better ones.

The Devil Made Me Do It

**Georgina Spelvin
Little Red Hen
Books (2006)
Available from
www.lulu.com**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

It was the 1970s and the anti-Vietnam War movement was in full swing. Much of it was fuelled by small communes of intensely civic-minded people who all fell under the generic name of "hippies". One such was Georgina Spelvin (that's not her real name, but it's the one she went under for her later films). . The commune she was a member of needed money to pay their rent.



Georgina Spelvin

Georgina had left her second husband and was working with the commune. She already had some editing and film production skills from working on commercials for corporate America so it seemed logical to find work in that area. The only jobs available seemed to be for young women willing to show their tits, so she decided to give in and look for work in that area although she was neither particularly young nor overly endowed. She got lucky and found a producer who was looking for some extras, a boat on which they could film, and a more mature lady lead. The film was *High Priestess of Sexual Witchcraft*.

Through the people she knew at the commune she was able to satisfy the director's other needs and she was offered the role of the high priestess. It was a bit of an education, but from her comments in the book Georgina managed to take it in her stride. She learned some of the basics of the industry on the pointy end of the camera.

The porn industry at this time was really working the cheap exploitation end of the market. Films were shot in days, preferably with only one take per scene. They were turned out as rapidly as possible and the "money shot" was king. There were a few well known names in the industry but most of the actors and actresses were unsure when or if they would ever get any more work. Georgina was lucky enough to meet producer Gerard Damiano, who had already had a success with the slightly better-than-average *Deep Throat*, a film Georgina had never heard of.

"Deep Throat"? You don't know Deep Throat?" he asks in mock horror.

"I've never heard of it. What's it about, a giraffe?"

Damiano was casting for a new film and Georgina thought there might be some production work available. Her contact for Damiano was Harry Reims, a well known male lead in the industry at the time. He had also starred in *Deep Throat*.



Linda Lovelace
The star of Deep Throat

Harry directed her to Damiano, who did indeed have a job open – catering for the film crew. Georgina took it. While waiting for Damiano she helped one of the lead characters in the new film to practice his lines by reading the other parts to him. At the end of this Damiano offered her the lead in the new film, *The Devil In Miss Jones*.

Georgina treats us to a wonderful set of anecdotes about the joys and hassles of filmmaking. The group, crew, production and actors, soon get to know each other and that camaraderie begins to form – even though it's only for a few days. Those who know her are quite non-judgmental about the film. To them, in this time of relatively free love, it's just a job.

There is a magic moment when she meets Herman, who on their first meeting starts "exploring the warmer parts of my anatomy". Herman is a boa constrictor, and he and Georgina get on so well a snake scene was hurriedly written into the film. Herman is a natural porn actor. For more detail, buy the book. Herman shared her bed that night, and many cold nights thereafter. We are treated to many inside secrets of the trade, probably far more than we need to know. In Georgina's slightly humorous, slightly caustic style it comes across as funny, not smutty.

"I even figured out why they call it a blowjob. Before you stick it down your throat its better to blow away any loose hairs".

Georgina was somewhat surprised to find that Harry could actually act, and it appeared that

she must have had some talent too, as the film was a huge success. It was one of the first porn films to actually make a profit and a lot of that glory rubbed off on Georgina. The exploration of many taboo areas stunned a lot of filmgoers but its quality and intelligent plot were obvious. It went a long way towards lifting the image of porn films.



It didn't, however, do much for Georgina's career. Apart from some followup work like premieres and so on there were few other films. She was able to play on her fame for some years as a stripper, but she was also fighting an alcohol addiction. Her mother took her in hand and helped her control it, and she even managed to get an office job and hang onto it. During this she found some time to appear in *Desires In Young Girls*. Then her mother (and shortly afterwards her father) died.

With her share of the estate she bought a house in Hollywood, her longtime dream. While there she met John, her future husband. Although she was over fifty, she was inducted into the Legends of Erotica and seems surprised that after all those years she was still remembered.

The book is interesting for its total shamelessness, Georgina doesn't fill pages trying to justify her career. She was a product of her times and did what she could to make a living, and I can respect her for her total lack of embarrassment about it. She is quite open about the industry and her role in it, and its effects on her.

The book is actually moderately funny, especially where she discusses the industry itself and its attempts to produce what it thinks the public wants. The success of *The Devil in Miss Jones* over the standard quickie skin flick suggests that the industry may have underestimated the public.

In the Heat of Battle
Donough O'Brien
2009
Osprey Publishing

"A history of those who rose to the occasion and those who didn't"

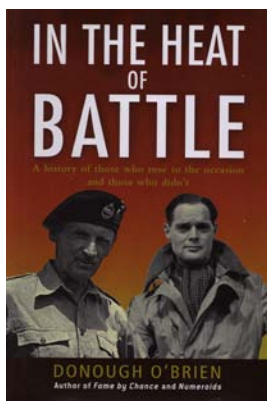
O'Brien points out that in the last three and a half thousand years the world has only been at peace for two hundred and thirty. Little wonder, then, that there was plenty of opportunity for heroic men and women to make a difference.

He gives us the standard collection of heroes (some might say "idiots") who led heroic charges into the face of the enemy or who single-handedly saved the day, but he also gives us those whose more minor roles made such a difference without the spectacle and waste of battle. I liked his non-partisan approach. Not all heroes were British or male. He covers people like Joan of Arc who tried to unite her people to resist the English and lost her life as a result. There is Shaka, the great Zulu chief, who DID unite his people and whose military tactics were the dread of the British in South Africa.

One of the most unrecognised heroes of World War I was a young Turkish commander named Mustafa Kemal. Sidelined by his superiors because of personality clashes he was put in charge of a section of Turkish coastline that should have been a military backwater. Such a post would have done nothing for his career if it wasn't for a disastrous blunder by Winston Churchill, who decided to invade Turkey. The section of coastline called the Gallipoli peninsula went down in the history of Turkey, Australia and New Zealand. Kemal's defence pinned down thousands of invading soldiers.

The Turkish soldiers under Kemal's leadership gained a reputation as fierce fighters and earned the respect of the invaders. His reputation was made and he went on to become known as Kemal Ataturk, the "father" of modern Turkey. Gallipoli was the first time Australians had fought a significant battle as one country instead of a collection of British colonies, so it did much to bring Australians together as a nation as well.

It also created closer ties between Australians and the neighbouring New Zealanders. Kemal



Mustafa Kemal (Kemal Ataturk) Father of the Turks

was the right man in the right spot at the right time, but his history is little known in the Western world.

Let us not forget those who fought in the background, also. Constance Babington Smith was an examiner of aerial photographs during World War II in England. Her keen eyes and brilliant military assessment capability led to the identification of the experimental V1 rockets at Peenemunde. They were bombed and this saved Britain from many months of V1 attacks. She also identified the amazing little Messerschmitt 163 rocket-powered interceptor and the twin-jet Messerschmitt 262 fighter from aerial reconnaissance.

O'Brien goes well back in history to find those who made a difference – like Horatius Cocles (Horatio in its anglicised version). Horatio's defence of a vital bridge kept an Etruscan army out of Rome while defences were organised. Valour was not just an old-time virtue, though, and O'Brien also gives us modern examples from the Vietnam War and the Falkland Islands.

The second section of the book is just as interesting. It discusses those who simply didn't have what it takes and how their indecision or blundering led to the deaths of so many. From Kennedy's abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba to Saddam Hussein's delusions about his own power, history is full of modern examples of stupidity.

As O'Brien works back through time we have examples like General Macarthur's virtual conquering of North Korea, then the orders from his political masters to pull back in case the Chinese became upset. Half a century later the border is still militarised and North Korea is under the control of a half-mad dictator.

British colonial history is absolutely full of arrogant, foolish men who administered its vast empire with no thought for the local people. It is not surprising that British colonial history, therefore, is really a history of revolts, battles, civil uprisings and mass slaughter.

From the American War for Independence to the Indian Mutiny to the passive resistance of Ghandi, the British managed to upset the populations of their Empire with disastrous results. Australia is one of the few countries ever to gain independence from Britain without having to fight for it. Whenever things were otherwise quiet for England and before it had its growing Empire the British would involve themselves in European wars.

They were not alone in these blunders, however. Whenever a self-promoting power-hungry idiot like Herman Goering, Winston Churchill or George Custer was on the scene it was the common soldier who was going to suffer the most.

Josef Stalin is unmatched. When Germany invaded Russia during World War II, Stalin was well-prepared. He had purged his military of its best commanders. He had done nothing to improve the quality of their dreadful road and rail system so troops could be moved quickly to where they were needed. He did have a good intelligence service who told him when and where the Germans would invade, but he ignored them. As a result millions of Russians died in the war.

O'Brien's book is an entertaining read but you can't complete it without a serious rise in your cynicism. Although many of the articles are brief he always gives enough information that you can see the bigger picture and see past the spin put on these people by history.

You can only ask how some of them got away with their blunders, and why so many brave men and women had to die to put them right.

La Muse
Adi Tantimedh and
Hugo Putrus
Big Head Press
(2008)

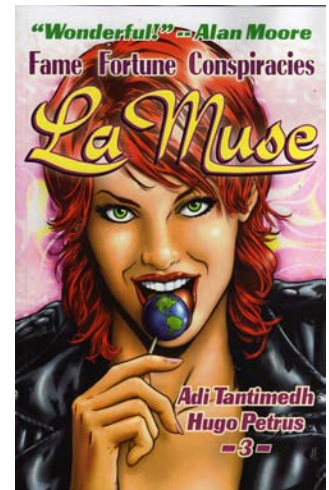
Reviewer:
 Jeremy Kong

This beautifully illustrated and well written "comic" is a well thought out world domination story. It is aimed at mature audiences, since things like the orgy with the twenty skinheads may give the kiddies the wrong idea.

Susan La Muse is an omnipotent being, bisexual, attractive, 20-something, and a flower child of the 60s. Her sister Libby is an otherwise completely normal sexually-frustrated human being and the relationship between the two has its ups and downs.

The story starts when Susan foils a terrorist plot involving a suicide bomber in a London crowd. She was being filmed at the time so now her powers are known worldwide. She decides that now she will "fix the world", not by taking control but by (mostly) more subtle means. The world governments who have been doing well for themselves are determined to do something about Susan, since her "fixing" is causing an economic downturn to their wealth. The fat cats decide that she must be taken out. She is also hated by homophobes, religious fanatics, and anti-abortionists. Her list of enemies is endless. Her attempts to rapidly improve the world only seem to attract more radical enemies.

Her Mum and Dad are not too pleased about her mucking around with the world, either.



They are also powerful beings and they threaten to destroy the Universe. Halfway through the book Susan loses her powers, which can be a disadvantage with everyone out to kill you. She only has her very practically-minded sister to help her.

"Try anything once, except incest and Morris Dancing, right?" The story is a good "How To" manual on world domination, supported by better-than-average colour graphics. It's a great fun read.

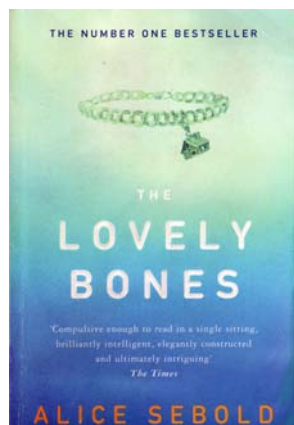
The Lovely Bones
Alice Seybold
Picador
Pan MacMillan (2002)

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Susie Salmon, aged 14, has been murdered. A friendly but somewhat strange neighbour lured her into a cornfield while she was on her way home from school and killed her in a little room he had dug out under the cornfield. Now Susie is in her private version of heaven watching those below trying to cope with her disappearance and presumed death.

Susie has friends in heaven, including other murder victims, and life is quite pleasant for a fourteen-year-old. Heaven is really just a place of nice memories that she can relive day after day. There is, however, one nagging dissatisfaction.

"I wasn't gone. I was alive in my own perfect world, but in my heart I knew it wasn't perfect. My murderer still haunted me."



Susie sees her family break up, her father go to pieces obsessed by the man he knows murdered his daughter, and her younger sister become stronger as she matures and tries to hold the family together.

Then Susie has her chance. One of her previous girlfriends is quite psychically sensitive and as she has grown up she has become aware of Susie's ghost, always there and trying to communicate. Briefly she makes a huge sacrifice and surrenders her body to Susie's ghost so Susie can do what she must. Will it be revenge on her murderer? Can she keep her family together?

It's hard to describe the book. It deals with subjects that are almost taboo in society, but does so in a sensitive and graceful way. Alice Seybold captures the slightly naïve style of a fourteen-year old girl perfectly, and it is this innocence and exploration of growing up that makes Susie so believable.

It's not a ghost story as such, nor is it a revenge or murder mystery, so don't expect overtones of horror. Even Susie's description of her murder is done with taste and brevity. There is even a slight tone of sympathy for Susie's murderer as she finds out more about his lonely, deprived boyhood.

What brought the book to my attention is that Peter Jackson, the New Zealand film producer, has now made it into a film. In a limited test release by Paramount it was widely criticised by American audiences - perhaps understandable as it is low on action and high on personality.

This would not make it appealing to U.S. audiences, even though the quality of the acting was praised. I suspect we will see it as direct-to-DVD rather than a cinema release. Currently it is slated for release in 2010.

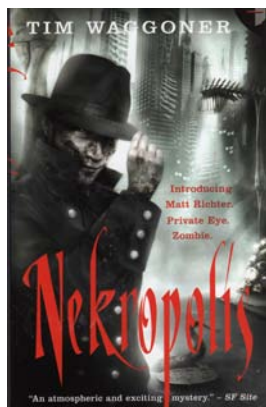
Nekropolis
Tim Waggoner
Angry Robot 2009

Reviewer: Jeremy Kong

"I was suiting in Scullys nursing a beer that I couldn't taste and would have to throw up later"

Matt Richter is a private eye who is also a zombie. He and his partner were accidentally sucked into the Netherworld and he is doing his best to fit in. He also has to pay for his anti-necrosis spells to stop him rotting away. He

handles cases like rescuing souls from demons. In this book he is asked to investigate the theft of an Orb whose powers can be turned against the Creator of the Netherworld. If its powers are misused the entire Netherworld may disintegrate into chaos as the various city leaders fight each other, then disappear.



In typical private eye tradition he is approached by a damsel in distress to take on the case of the missing Orb. She was supposed to be guarding the Orb when it was stolen.

Can Matt survive the power struggles, the monsters and the soul stealers who like to eat dead flesh and regard Matt as a walking buffet?

We meet a range of interesting characters like the Librarian. In return for his services the Librarian will reach inside Matt and take out a page of his life. There is the monstrous cabdriver whose cab eats customers it doesn't like. The bar owner has a genetically engineered creature that has a number of interesting modifications like fast regrowing flesh so he can cater for his odder customers' tastes.

The book is written in a dry humorous style that perfectly takes off the old Phillip Marlowe-type detective stories. Underneath, though, the film noir influence shows through.

I liked the story for its twists and differences. The unfamiliar Netherworld with its completely different values sets off the well-drawn characters. Waggoner gives us new characters at every turn and the story never bogs down.

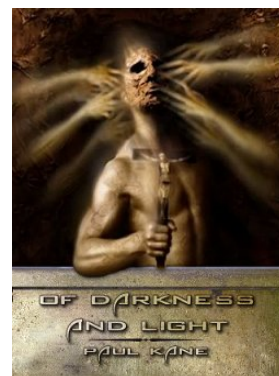
Of Darkness and Light
Paul Kane
2009
Thunderstorm Books

Paul Kane has written an interesting short novel with a twist on the light versus dark, good versus evil battle. He crafts some fine characters, which is essential if the book is not to degenerate into some sort of light fantasy. The characters carry the tale rather than the events.

Lee Masterton has always been afraid, no, terrified, of the dark. There is something there, watching him. It's a common enough phobia

among the young, but Lee is now in his late teens and he hasn't grown out of it. He simply KNOWS there is something or someone there watching him. He is right. There is.

He is going through a bad time. He has just been dumped by his girlfriend. His mother is throwing the usual inane sayings at him – *"plenty more fish in the sea"*, *"Some day somebody'll come along .."* and so on. His Dad has turned into a nasty money hungry bully. Even his grandmother is losing her marbles. His best mate, Scott, can only offer solace through large amounts of beer. Lee is about to lose his unemployment benefits.



The housing estate on which he lives is run down and appears to have lost its soul. The people are mean and getting meaner, more interested in gossiping about other people than improving their own increasingly miserable and spiteful lives. Vandalism is becoming a major problem. There is a redevelopment going on and Lee is sent there to apply for a job. It turns out to be night watchman, hardly a good job for someone afraid of the dark, but it's that or lose his Unemployment benefit.

That night he finds out that there is indeed something to be afraid of. In what appears to be a battle between the light and the dark, some local graffiti painters are swallowed up by a darkness that seems to have arms (or tentacles) and legs. Lee now knows the darkness is evil. He couldn't be more wrong.

The estate is set to become the battlefield between good and the all-pervading evil that has turned taken the estate's spirit and turned it into a depressed slum. The battle is focused on Lee since he is the only one who can see the dwellers in the dark and the light. Is he up to it? There will be many surprises for him as his world is reversed. So many people are not what they seem.

Kane's skilful writing carries the estate's mood of depression well and sets the stage for the action that follows. It's a great story and Lee's mood is the thread that carries it through. He is a reluctant hero pushed into prominence because of the one "talent" he would rather do without - his fear of the dark.

Royal Flush Book 6

Royal Flush is by-lined Entertainment for Morons and Good Art for Bad Kids and it certainly fills these criteria with abundance. It is a rip-roaring funny, rude, crude and bizarre magazine filled with amazing artwork and even more amazing features. It is superbly presented with full colour throughout and with two fold out posters in the most current edition, Book Six 2009.



Articles range from the sublime to the ridiculous, in Book Six there are some superb features; The Kings of Comedy (Brian Posehn, Jeff Gaffigan and Jeff Ross), the friendship between Frank Zappa and the king of comics, Jack Kirby, articles on Leslie Nielsen, Hugh Hefner, Joan Jett and Alice Cooper, a behind-the-scenes look at Californication and a profile of the art of Basil Gogos.

There are also lots of short articles such as adult star Jenna Jameson discussing how to Make love like a Jedi and 30 Days in the Hole discussing rock stars anal sex experiences. There are lots of cartoons, comics and rare photos.

Royal Flush is a visually overpowering magazine, it smacks you in the face with its style before you even start reading its outré content. It is over 100 pages of riotous content and every issue is well worth getting hold of.

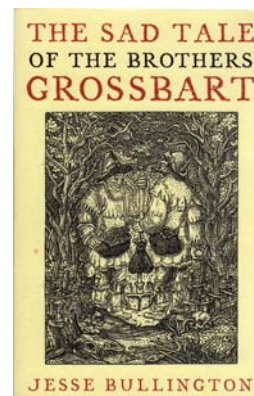
Web: <http://royalflushmagazine.com/>



The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart Jesse Bullington Orbit (2009)

Reviewers:
Jeremy and Renate
Kong

This book is about grave-robbing twins Hegel and Manfred Grossbart.



It is set in 1364 in medieval Europe, a time of superstition and demons. The Grossbarts make their living by grave robbing the rich. They see nothing wrong with this, since Europe at the time is populated by a few rich people and a lot of downtrodden poor people. The story also has a fair helping of Demons, witches and other monsters.

The Grossbart's ultimate goal is to go to Egypt and dig up all the ancient pharaohs, as their grandfather once tried to do. Meanwhile they turn to more evil doings.

They start their adventures by killing a man's family in front of him. They believe he has slighted them in some way. They axe the wife, slit the son's throat in front of his father and set fire to the house with the two daughters inside. Inadvertently they leave the father alive, a mistake as it turns out.

The story follows their adventures from there. They murder, steal, fight demons, encounter witches (not the nice kind, but the ones that murder and eat their own kids) and start a crusade. All this is set against a background of the Black Plague. The Grossbarts are the worst kind of psychopaths - they have no remorse, no social conscience and a twisted view of the world and religion. They only survive by continued good luck and brutality and their stubborn refusal to give up. In this respect they are often tougher than the monsters they face.

Then we have the traditional forest witch who has children to her demon lover, fattens them and eats them. *"Growing fast, growing strong" she winked at Hegel, making his knees soften. He leaned against the wall, his brother out of breath from his diatribe,* She receives poetic justice when she is eaten by her own children. The witch before she dies curses the Grossbarts..

"Vengeance will be wrought, not with my hands but by what grows. You will lose everything, Grossbarts, and you will know I have played a hand in every misery that befalls you. Every dog that bites, every assassin that stalks, every man that turns against youI could have slaughtered you when you first came, and I'm glad that I did not, for your undoing will become legend."

She turns the father of the murdered family into a Demon. He follows the brothers around – if they can receive absolution from a priest they will go to heaven and it is his job to make sure this doesn't happen. The brothers are absolute bastards and you really, badly want them to have a taste of their own medicine. Can they survive the forces building against them?

"...the Brothers Grossbart are about to discover that all legends have their truths, and worse fates than death await those who would take the red road of villainy ..."

Jesse Bullington has constructed a terribly dark, evil view of the times and the people. The bibliography shows the extensive research that has gone into the book to make it as authentic as possible. His background in History and English Literature are put to good use. Even the humour is very dark. It's not quite like any other book on these times. If you like your stories with a bit of bite and bile, this is one for you.

Shock cinema Quarterly

Shock Cinema has been one of the longest running cult film magazine in the industry, publishing since 1990.

It is published quarterly and the editor, Steven Puchalski is also the author of *Slimetime, a Guide to Sleazy, Mindless Movies*. Each issue has a colour cover and high quality internal printing.

Issues of *Shock Cinema* come in at around 50 pages and all include three or four major features.



These tend to be focus articles and interviews with actors and figures within the world of "genre" cinema. In Issue 37 there were interviews with Dick Anthony Williams (illustrated with photos from throughout his career), Francine York, James Hampton and Jorge Rivero.

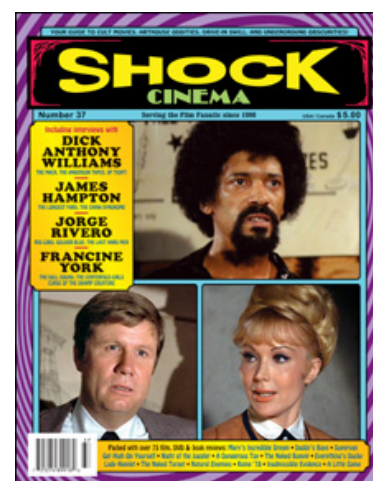
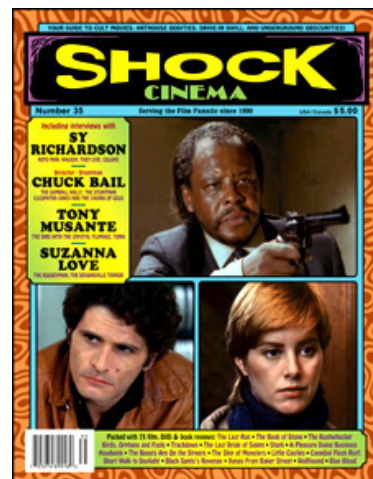
Issue 35 included interviews with Sy Richardson, Suzanna Love, Tony Musante and Stuntman and Director, Chuck Ball.

Each issue includes around 70 DVD and Book reviews. The Film Reviews section cover all manner of weirdness, many of which are only available on DVD-R. The companies who quirky titles are listed so you can contact them to purchase. The DVD-R industry is small in Australia, but in the U.S. there are a large number of firms offering rare DVD's via this medium and it is great to see such coverage.

DVD Dementia covers releases through mainstream companies but still has a very strong genre cinema focus, from cult to exploitation, horror to adult. Underground Oddities looks at indie films and includes reviews of a small select number of titles. Shocking Books covers books within the field.

Shock Cinema is an exceptional magazine, beautifully present, heavy with content and offering unique interviews. Its reviews are comprehensive and every issue is a delight.

Web: <http://www.shockcinemamagazine.com>



2012
Sony
R4 DVD

2012 is another big budget disaster-melodrama from Roland Emmerich of *Independence Day* and *The Day After Tomorrow* fame. Emmerich does tend to follow a formula with his film which he has honed to a fine art. There is lots of action, overblown plots, little to no character development, an overemphasis on the nuclear family and related sentimentalism matched with over-the-top extremely high budget special effects.

Using speculation about the end of world Emmerich ties together hokey religious superstitions, overwrought emotionalism and grand spectacle with quite astounding CGI.

However, this is a film which really cannot be taken seriously in terms of plot or character development. The storyline takes its cue from new age speculation about the end of the world and mixes in all manner of pseudo-science. It tries to sound all scientific using references to the new age favourite pseudo scientist Charles Hapgood and spends most of the film revelling in the most ludicrous speculations. The credits mention the film is inspired by *Footprints of the Gods* by Graham Hancock. Hancock is celebrated by quack archaeologists worldwide for his unorthodox opinions.

If that is not enough 2012 celebrates religious lunacy as the people of the world unite in prayer rather than making any real effort to survive. Scenes such as when the roof on the cathedral in Rome crashes on believers end up having a truly dark and ironic sense of humour. Of course the United States works out the truth



about the coming catastrophe before anyone else and creates “arks” to save the cream of the crop to create a future world. What a future world it will be! Filled with rich bloated bankers, billionaires and anyone else who can afford the one billion euro ticket to get on-board. To supposedly get us to feel the “personal” side of the tale Emmerich places his focus on Jackson Curtis, his ex-wife and her new husband and their two kids. It is so American apple-pie it is revolting. You just know that the new interloper husband will get it (which he does) and Jackson and his wife will get together again (which they do) and the nuclear family will be part of the new world. Ahh shucks !

There is a good sub plot about government corruption with Adrian Hemsley, advisor to the president representing the conscience of a basically immoral group of politicians. He encourages the president to notify the world of the imminent disaster, even if it is way too late, and forces the hand of the bureaucrats to allow more people on-board when one of the arks fail.

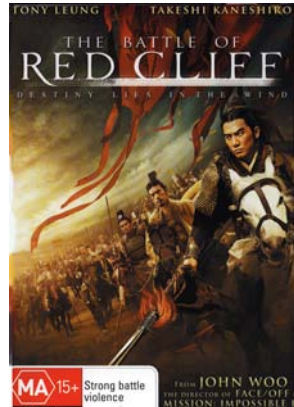
None of this really means much to be honest, this is a film you watch for the breathtaking CGI. It cost \$250 million U.S to make and it looks every cent. There are scenes which are so absolutely ridiculous they nearly make your laugh but look absolutely incredible. How often the Curtis family escape disaster with earthquakes, volcanoes and collapsing cities trailing them is totally unbelievable. Within a few moments of the disaster beginning common sense just goes right out the window and never comes back. The sheer ferocity of the disaster scenes are amazing and in many ways the portrayal of a small nuclear family bent on survival at all costs while the world is destroyed around them is a little disconcerting. Some reviewers have actually coined the term “disaster porn” to refer to this film and while I can understand their point I would not necessarily go that far. But I am in two minds about 2012.

On one hand it is an unintentionally amusing ride through the end of the world using incredible CGI. On the other hand I think there is a danger giving credibility to pseudo-science, superstition and bogus beliefs about the end of the world. There is enough hype about 2012 without adding mainstream Hollywood films into the mix. Too often speculation about the end of the world has led religious cults into very dark places and this sort of film can easily feed the paranoia that so many of the world’s religions are already filled to the brim with.



The Curtis family battling against all odds

**The Battle of Red
Cliff (2008)**
2008
**Peoples Republic of
China**
War Drama
**Produced by Three
Kingdoms**
Icon Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Mandarin with English subtitles

This magnificent film by John Woo is one of those wonderful period dramas that we have come to expect from the Chinese film industry. Beautiful scenery, spectacular sets, a cast literally of thousands, stunning CGI – all are used to their best to produce an epic film of the kind that Hollywood has forgotten how to make. It is based on a period in Chinese history when the country was being consolidated into what became the Three Kingdoms.

The Prime Minister of the northern area, Cao Cao, (basically a warlord), used his authority as the representative of the weak and inexperienced Emperor Xian to take most of northern China into the late Han Dynasty empire. The only areas still holding out against his superior forces were the regions south of the Yangtse River controlled by Liu Bei and Sun Quan. In 208 – 209 AD Cao Cao's forces descended on the southerners and a major strategic battle occurred at the fort of Red Cliff. Cao Cao's forces were both land based cavalry and foot soldiers and a massive river Navy of up to ten thousand ships.

This story opens as Liu Bei has suffered yet another defeat against the superior forces of Cao Cao. He knows he can only survive with the

help of Sun Quan's army and navy. His chief strategic advisor Zhuge Liang is sent to form an alliance with Sun Quan. With the political side agreed to, it is time for battle.

A small group of Sun Quan's cavalry is sent to attack the advancing army. They draw a large part of the army into following them and lead them into an ambush in which Cao Cao's troops are destroyed in a savage, spectacular battle. Cao Cao's army contains a large number of conscripts and soldiers surrendered from other armies and they are no match for the highly trained troops of Sun Quan.

With his army weakened Cao Cao decides he must now wage a naval battle against the main enemy forces at Red Cliff. His navy forms up facing the fort. The navy of Sun Quan is seriously outnumbered and he finds that his troops don't even have enough arrows to fight the still-huge northern army and navy gathered against him. Bows and arrows are the main short-range fighting weapons so he must have a large supply on hand or his forces will simply run out of "ammunition". A clever plan is devised where a group of ships is set up to stage a mock attack on Cao Cao's navy and is riddled with arrows as a result. The arrows are caught in bundles of straw lashed to the small boats and they return riddled with enough arrows to supply the land forces.

Many of Cao Cao's ships have been lashed together to give them stability, since the northern forces are not used to fighting on moving, rocking boats. This turns out to be a bad decision. The opening of the main battle involves using fireships to burn the opposing fleet. These depend heavily on the direction of the prevailing wind – guess the wind right and your fireships will burn the enemy fleet, get it wrong and your own fleet will be destroyed. This decisive battle will be decided on which tactician can guess right.



Action plus in the Battle of Red Cliff



Good storytelling and character development

It is spectacular and the destruction is immense.

The film cost 80 million dollars to make and was the most expensive Chinese film to date. I must admire the quality of the production, from the careful use of the scenery along the Yangtse river to the beautifully crafted ships to the immensely detailed costumes and armour. John Woo has the skill to handle such an epic and the money was not wasted. This will become a classic of Chinese film.

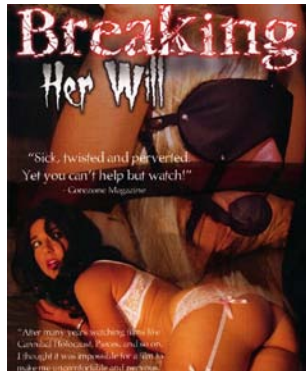
Breaking Her Will
Bill Zebub
Productions
R1 DVD

This rather odd independent production is difficult to classify, containing as it does a number of themes that could be regarded as cinema contraband. As pornography it is only mildly titillating, not hardcore, so it can't really be called torture porn. Even calling it "torture" is overdoing it as the torture is mostly mental rather than physical. It abounds in humiliation and bondage but its main themes are psychological.

The plot is fairly conventional for this type of film. A young woman is kidnapped, tied to a cross, gagged and tortured to turn her into a submissive slave. Her captor is a socially inadequate, mentally disturbed young man who gets most of his inspiration for his torture and domination scenarios from the Internet. These don't hold up for long in reality, though.



A surprisingly psychological take on dominance and torture.



Control and Dominance are the name of the game

"I want to rape you – I don't want to have consensual sex"

He tells her a fanciful story about being a "trainer" of girls for a powerful underground white slavery ring. He "trains" her by a cycle of torture, discomfort, punishment and the occasional reward. Gradually the girl comes to realise that the only way she will get out alive is by becoming submissive to him and to persuade him to keep her for his own rather than hand her on the "slavers". The unreality of the environment in which she is kept helps her make this decision.

The young man now has what he thought he wanted – a submissive girl. But now what? Somehow her total submission is dissatisfying. She will soon see through his story about the slave ring. Without the thrill of domination his life is again missing something. He kidnaps another girl but his carefully staged gang rape scenario goes wrong and she dies in front of the first girl. What can he do now?

The psychological permutations of the film are interesting, but I have to say the film is not particularly well produced. Most of the film takes place in a basement and there doesn't appear to be much space since we get the same point of view most of the time. The sound leaves much to be desired and the music is inappropriate. The acting, however, is good and saves the film from being just exploitative trash. Overall I thought the film was interesting and could only have been made by an independent with a bit of guts. It's just that it could have been so much more.

City on Fire (2009)
Regent Entertainment
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

This is a somewhat better than average “end of the world” film drawing on current ecological concerns to make its point.



An energy supply firm, Unicorp, has located a huge pocket of methane gas under California. They have been test drilling around the pocket to measure its size. The methane, however, is making its way up to the surface through cracks in the rocks caused by the drilling disturbance. This coincides with a hundred-degree heatwave. Spot fires and methane explosions are breaking out across the Los Angeles area. Unicorp is trying to cover up their part in the problem for commercial gain. Their measuring and test drilling is being pushed ahead and is nearly finished, but their slipshod work will cause them problems if they are found to be the cause of the fires.

There is a bigger problem brewing. The escaping methane is causing a mini-greenhouse effect over the Los Angeles basin. It is being intensified by the other gases like carbon dioxide coming from the fires. This is causing a heat wave like none ever seen before. When the temperature hits 140 degrees it will vapourise so much methane that the effect will reach a runaway level and the thermal rise will be unstoppable. The increased pressure from the heat will rupture the huge main gas pocket and it will all be over for life in the LA basin. That is estimated to happen early in the evening of this day.

There are some who see that the fires cannot be naturally caused. At the Grier Research Centre a scientist, Dr Charles Covington, is



End of the world scenario for L.A.



Timely depictions of raging U.S. Fires

working for Unicorp and is controlling the drilling program by computer. He is unaware of the problems Unicorp is causing. In the same building Dr Kate Jansen has a so-far unsuccessful research project on cloud-seeding under way. Her work is hampered by her lack of publishable success and her funding at the lab is under threat. She realises that the Unicorp drilling and methane release is the cause of the higher-than-normal heat wave. The State's Governor Quinlan is in the building and orders Covington to shut down the drilling. Covington warns them that enough methane has already been released to start the runaway cycle. Governor Quinlan orders Los Angeles evacuated.

The corrupt manager of Unicorp also comes to the lab, intending to kill the lab manager who has threatened to tell the Governor what he knows of the methane project and its effects. Covington, now he knows what disaster his work has caused, has a change of conscience. Kate Jansen believes that her cloud seeding research may give her a way to lower the temperature if she can seed a storm cloud that is building up and heading towards LA, but her access to the expensive drone that seeds the clouds has been cut off by the lab manager.

Together they must defeat Unicorp's manager and convince the lab manager to release control of the drone to them. They must get it loaded and fly it into a developing storm and try to make it rain. Even then, will it work?

The story is generally credible but has some defects, like the cloud-seeding – that technology has been proven in Australia for over fifty years - but it all comes together pretty well. The use of CGI and special effects is nothing spectacular, seeming to consist mostly of explosions and fire. This gives the film a low-budget look but it is made up for by some good acting. In a way I prefer the low-profile feel of the film. It could have been an excuse for lots of spectacular effects and a shallow plot, but I feel the approach taken by this film works better.

**The Day The Earth
Stopped 2008
The Asylum
Peacock Films
R4 DVD**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

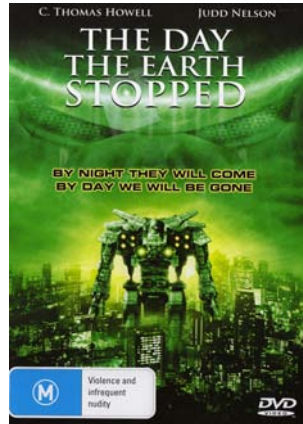
This film is an una-shamed remake of the earlier *The Day The Earth Stood Still* with an updated plot. So, for that matter, is the other current remake of *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. Although the original 1951 TDESS is regarded as a classic its plot was so full of holes and dodgy special effects that it really needed remaking and updating. Both the remakes seem to be an attempt to do this. So how effective is this one?

First it must be said that the film, like so many from The Asylum, has "budget production" written all over it. Minimal CGI, a script that could do with a bit more refining and actors whose hearts didn't seem to be in the job are just some of the problems. The CGI effects that are included are pretty ordinary. The script actually shows promise but doesn't quite make it.

On the positive side, producer / director / whatever C Thomas Howell, Judd Nelson and Darren Dalton manage to turn in performances that are at least adequate to carry the story well. Dalton particularly as the tough military commander manages a good change of character when he is gently reminded by an alien that if the Earth is going to end, shouldn't he be home with his wife and son? Nelson plays a good role as the scientist who simply cannot understand that he is playing with all the lives on Earth.



**The Day the Earth Stopped uses limited CGI
but does pretty well in the storytelling**



**Considering the flop of the Hollywood
remake this is an interesting alternative**

The story will be familiar to all who saw the original *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. Aliens have detected the rise in military power of the earth nations and the irresponsibility they show in the use of their weapons. This is highlighted later in the film when the Pacific island of Nauru is destroyed by an atomic bomb in an attempt to kill the huge robot that has landed there. Thousand of people are killed on the independent island country, but the scientist in charge of the project shrugs it off as a place where the smallest number of people would die. The hundreds of robots that have landed around the Earth will feed a combined magnetic pulse into the Earth's core that will slow its rotation and throw the earth out of orbit.

Two humanoids in charge of the robots have delivered an ultimatum to Earth – the destruction will occur at sunset unless the humans can

"show me that there is value in human life ... prove this to me and there will be a tomorrow..."

Josh Myron (C Thomas Howell), one of the men detailed to guard the female alien, Skye, believes her and helps her to escape. He is at a loss to show her what she is looking for, though, and it seems the earth is doomed. While evading the Task Force they help a man whose wife is having a baby. The wife dies in childbirth. Skye, with the dead woman's baby in her arms, shows compassion and brings the woman back to life.

This forces her to feel human compassion and to believe that there may be something in humanity that is worth saving. She decides to call off the destruction. Now Skye and Myron must get back to her robot to communicate her deci-

sion while the Task Force will do anything to keep her on Earth.

Superficially the film is a lightweight bit of drama, but the underlying performances give it strength. Unlike so many American films these days the U.S. military cannot save the day for Earth – this in itself is a pleasant change. Howell's strong performance as the ordinary guy who has to fight the system for his beliefs is also notable in that he is not shown as some sort of superhero. The film's basic idea follows the original film fairly closely so the power of the concept of "stop fighting or you will all die" is kept.

Perhaps grudgingly, and even allowing for its defects, I liked the film.

D.C. Sniper
Peacock Films 2010
R4 DVD

In Washington in 2002 eleven people were shot at random by a sniper whose stated aim was to overthrow the U.S. government by terror. This story is very loosely based on the sniper, his accomplice, and the detectives who finally arrested him.

John Mohammed (played by Ken Foree) is a Desert Storm veteran, a charismatic individual whose political manifesto is a jumbled mash of black rights, discrimination, the Big Corporations who really run the world, and corrupt government. The only way he can see to change the system is to wage a campaign of terror against the people of Washington until they overthrow their government. He is helped by John Malvo,



A violent rampage which leaves many dead



D.C. Sniper is based on real events

a teenage boy he has brought up as his son, but who still has a spark of humanity left in him. He is the one who does the shooting and he is powerless to stop in the face of his "father's" continuous indoctrination.

Against him the police force is helpless because of the random nature of the murders. Two rogue cops manage to work outside the police investigation and gradually develop a feeling for the Sniper and what he may do next. Slowly they close in on him. One detective is distracted by his missing runaway daughter. She has now turned up making porno movies for the internet and he is devoting too much of his time to finding her and getting her away from her exploitative boyfriend. Sometimes he needs a break from the intensity of both man-hunts.

On one occasion he visits the Potomac River where George Washington staged a surprise Christmas Day attack on British forces. He reflects that Washington was branded a terrorist by the British for ignoring the rules of war (you just don't make war at Christmas) and for his unconventional tactics of hiding snipers in trees. He makes one observation that is rather chillingly accurate – "War is the terrorism of the rich, terrorism is the war of the poor".



Hate out of control

His meditations give him an idea of looking for a vehicle that could be used to hide a sniper and he starts to work in the right direction.

Unfortunately we know he is going to succeed because of producer Ulli Lommel's annoying overuse of flashback interviews to describe what happened before it is shown in the film. Some of the interviews are important, such as the Washington residents and victims' families discussing how impotent they feel in the face of terror and the inability of the police to stop it. Perhaps John Mohammed has the right approach to achieve his goals after all?

The film is rather slow moving and even the sniper scenes are drawn out. John Mohammed's rantings in his prison interviews had me reaching for the fast forward button after a while. The story is saved by some absolutely brilliant acting, and the build-up of tension as John selects their next victim and they work up to the shot.

If the motives expressed in the film genuinely reflect those of the real John Mohammed it should be compulsory viewing for all police and criminologist. John Mohammed was executed for the serial killings. John Malvo is serving life in prison.

Defying Gravity **Fox** **R1 DVD Series**

Defying Gravity is an intriguing science fiction series which sadly only went for one season. It first aired on August 2nd 2009 on ABC and CTV in the United States and Canada and was cancelled in the fall of 2009. Set in the year 2052, the series follows eight astronauts, four women and four men, from different countries and of different nationalities on a six-year space mission through the Solar System. The mission is publically represented as an exploration mission while secretly it is to explore the nature of an extra-terrestrial intelligence known as Beta. The team in space is complimented by a team of seven on earth as well as supporting staff.

The series is visually stunning and uses the very latest in CGI to create a truly lifelike space



Beta - the alien intelligence from Defying Gravity

experience. The look of the series cannot be faulted and it is probably the most advanced science fiction series made to date when it comes to special effects.

The characters are extremely well developed and the series combines an over-arching story about encounters with an extra-terrestrial intelligence with what is essentially a soap opera in space. The pace of the series is unusually slow and this make have contributed to the difficulties viewers had relating to it. The action was "uneven" with some episodes packed with tension and impressive plot twists while others just seem to glide along with little to nothing happening.

The soap opera aspect of the series is problematic. While on one level the interpersonal relationships provide a solid backbone to the series there are too many conservative themes which seem to overpower the series. The exploration of the machinations of NASA and big business, the stress of space travel and the balance of work and personal life are well explored. More irritating is the range of middle class "Republican" themes which seem to resonate throughout the series. There is the abortion guilt theme, the abuse recovered by memory theme (even though the whole repressed memory syndrome concept has been



thoroughly debunked) and the faith vs. science theme. The last is very heavy handed with the Paula Morales character constantly referencing the Bible and even praying before the Venus mission. Regardless of American religiosity I think it is extremely unlikely NASA would send someone into space who is so religiously obsessed and collapses into raves about Satan when put under stress.

There are other inconsistencies which mar the series, the doctor and psychiatrist, Evram Mintz, is on medication as a recovering alcoholic and has traumatic stress syndrome and yet somehow is on a six year mission. Unlikely. A further major plot flaw concerns Zoe Barns. She actually fails the training program and is seen leaving for Chicago and yet she lands a place as part of the team with no explanation of when or how she was called back into service. This is quite a glaring error in plot consistency.

While there are excellent and credible sub plots such as Evram Mintz's war experiences and Rollie Crane's alcoholic binge from stress which results in an accident in which a woman is left in a coma, too many of the themes seem religiously or spiritually based. Even Ajay Sharma, the Indian has his Hindu faith emphasized time and time again with dialogue which makes him seem like a two-bit guru rather than a human being. These characterizations take away rather than add to the series and I can begin to understand the decision to cancel the series. Too often the themes are heavy handed, conservative and use stereotypes rather than textured character development

In many ways *Defying Gravity* reminds me of the problems that plagued *Enterprise*, the final

Star Trek series. While it was able to overcome its first season jitters, it was still cancelled after season four. *Defying Gravity*, however, did not have that chance and it is hard to know where it would have gone. Would it have overcome its limitations, focused on the extra-terrestrial plot and become a successful sci-fi series ? Or would it have continued with the religious and new age hokum and become bogged down in middle class soap opera issues as clearly on show in the first season. Sadly we will never know. This was a series which was flawed but showed great potential and we really did not get a chance to know where it could have gone.

Exit Speed (2009)
Sabbatical Pictures
Peacock Films
R4

Reviewer:
 Bob Estreich

A bus cruises along a lonely Texas highway. A group of nomad Bikers harass the bus and one of the bikers is run over. The others set out for revenge. The bus pulls off the highway onto a side road and crashes in an old junk yard. The ten passengers must now fight for their lives.

"Nomad" bikers live in small groups. They pillage and terrorize an area, taking what they want, then move on.

From here the story is survival against the odds. Although each passenger has strengths



The Defying Gravity Team



The bus which crashes and leads to a life and death



The fight for survival

they also have weaknesses they must overcome if they are to get through the next day. There is the bow-and-arrow markswoman – hers is a useful weapon, but she won't use it to take a life. The disgraced sports coach has a gun he took from the body of the biker, but he can't shoot straight and won't give the gun up to the Army deserter, who can. There is the little old Mexican gentleman who appears harmless but is building a "spud gun" that can throw Molotov cocktails in among the bikers.

The bikers have called for reinforcements but for the passengers there can be no relief until the bus is reported overdue the next day. Until then they must live on their wits and abilities.

There is attrition on both sides. Finally the passengers must go on the offensive.

The plot is fairly conventional and we have seen similar films before, but overall the film is extremely well-done. The script is believable, the acting is good and there is as much action as you could want.

The personalities of the passengers develop to the point that they are no longer just anonymous faces and the friendships and loyalties that form seem right under the circumstances. Even the parasitic nomad bikers are better than average. Some of the scenes are quite bloody so be warned.

If a few of the actors and actresses look familiar it is because you have seen them before in minor roles. Now they get a chance to show what they can do, and they don't let us down. Good acting more than makes up for the ordinary plot.

If you just want ninety minutes of mayhem, this is a film I can recommend.

Gamer Roadshow R4 DVD

Gamer is an impressive dystopian science fiction film exploring a world where computer gaming has moved to the next level. Through the use of nanotechnology Ken Castle has been able to make himself richer than Bill Gates.



It all began with *Society*, a new and improved version of "Second Life or Sim City". Here human beings actually control human beings on a truly massive scale in a real world setting.

Through the use of avatars an individual in any part of the world can safely experience the life of another within a virtual-real world interface created by Castle's technology. Every pleasure can be indulged as can every vice, as clearly shown in the bizarre and suitably perverse sex clubs and rave events.

As Castle's fortunes rise, he decides to take his gaming empire to the next level and develops *Slayers*. For *Slayers* to work Castle has made a deal with the government and taken over the financing of the prison system. In return he gains access to prisoners to use in his new game. In a war like environment they fight as pawns in a life or death battle.

They are given their freedom if they survive thirty rounds of the game but none have made it so far.



Kable as played by Simon



Kable in action

While *Slayers* seems like an opportunity, vast numbers of prisoners are used as cannon fodder in an environment which becomes the equivalent of a virtual Roman arena.

Kable is a prisoner who has survived twenty seven rounds of *Slayers* but Castle has no intention of letting him go. At the same time there are those who see Castle's empire for what it is. They realize that now he has got control of the prisons and is already recruiting the sick and poor to use in his games, it is only a matter of time before he moves on to control the medical system and perhaps even the government. They encourage 17 year old Simon, Kable's controller, to not only talk directly to Kable but to let him take control of his destiny. Soon Kable breaks free of the game and must rescue his wife from her role as a sex worker in *Society* and together they must find their lost child.

Gamer is a powerful depiction of a world in which virtual reality has taken precedent over human interaction. It is the year 2034 and while Castle has gained success with his voyeuristic virtual world, it is with *Slayers* that the world is galvanized into the ecstasy of rioting football hooligans. The blood lust it has engendered has made Castle very rich but reduced the world to the lowest common denominator.

There is lots of action, violence and sex as

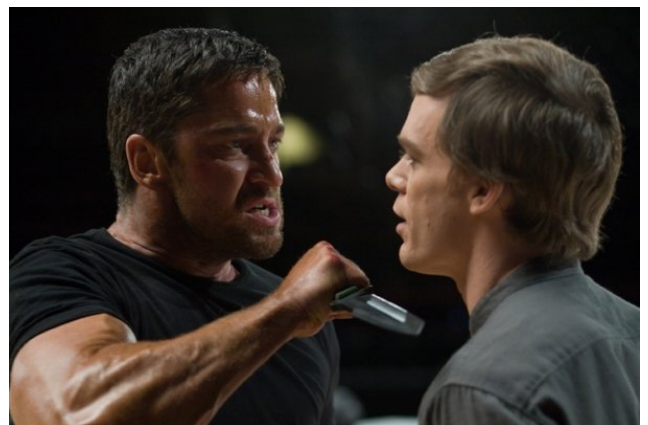
would be expected in a virtual world where every desire can be explored and expressed without reproach. While I have always argued against censorship and for free expression, *Gamer* does bring home the question of personal responsibility in a time where computer technology can offer untrammelled freedom with limitation.

At the same time I have some misgivings. The depiction of the fat neutered man controlling Kable's wife doesn't sit well and the inference that people who enjoy sex in the virtual world of *Society* will automatically move into extreme sex and violence is questionable.

It is very trendy today to get all moral about violence and sex in computer games and link it to violence in real life, though there is little evidence to prove such a connection. At the same time the whole concept of controlling other human beings within a virtual environment is unpalatable to say the least.

Gamer certainly has some great ideas behind it, taking current trends in interactive gaming and moulding a challenging storyline. In style it has been influenced by everything from *Blade Runner* to *Death Race* and *Running Man*. It has excellent cinematography mixing real-time with CGI. At times it is hard to tell what is "real" and what is "virtual" and this is part of the visual texture of the film. The score is extremely using a range of hard edged driving rock.

The quirkiness of *Gamers* makes it an unusual work of cinema, from Castle singing *I've Got You Under My Skin* in the final showdown to the ultra-violence of the game scenes. This is certainly an innovative and creative science fiction film.



Showdown between Kable and Castle

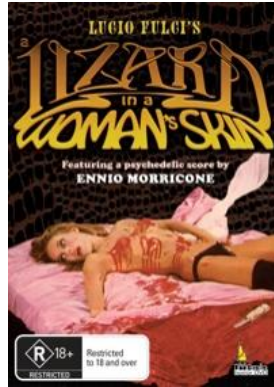
Lizard in a Woman's Skin
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD

One of the earliest Italian filmmakers to explore the world of giallo was Lucio Fulci.

In this lurid and gore ridden title, Fulci combines wild psychedelic sequences, bloody murders, orgies and lesbianism to create quite an impressive thriller. Photographed by Luigi Kuveiller, the man behind the camera in Dario Argento's *Deep Red*, it is marked by creative and innovative cinematography which belies its limited budget.

The film begins within a wonderfully disorienting and erotic dream sequence full of fast editing, bizarre imagery, slow motion, nudity and a psychedelic score from Ennio Morricone. It seems that wealthy socialite Carol Hammond has been having difficult times recently; she requires regular therapy and is plagued with overpowering erotic dreams of lesbian sex and orgies. Her trauma is exasperated when her neighbour Julia Durer, played by Anita Strindberg, is found brutally stabbed to death.

At first it seems Carol may have killed Julia in a disassociated state. She has recounted the crime to her psychiatrist and her fur and finger fingerprints are found at the scene; it is also her letter open which did the killing. While the evidence all points to Carol it all seems too clean and when her husband Frank is found to be having an affair by her father, a well-respected lawyer; the question arises as to whether she is



An excellent chase sequence through a mental institution

being framed. Claims of blackmail are thrown back and forth and the police have great difficulty getting to the truth. There are also a couple of hippies who are after Carol who seem to be connected to Carol's step daughter Joan.

This fascinating and convoluted tale continues with all manner of red herrings, strange twists and turns, brutal murders and an ending you will not expect. Many consider it to be Fulci's best film and it certainly stands out as one of the better giallo films ever made.

An excellent plot with good character development matched with sex, violence and an unexpected ending makes this a very successful tale.

There are some astounding stage set-pieces ranging from the Carol's lurid psychedelic visions to the truly horrid vivisection scene in the mental institution which nearly takes your breath away. There are also some truly great chase sequences including that through the mental institution and through a disused theatre.

While some may find the equating of lesbianism with madness and murder a bit dated, if you appreciate the time in which the film was made, you can enjoy it for what it is.

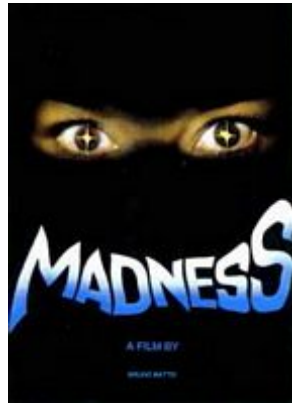
The edition from Umbrella Entertainment is well presented and the print is in great condition for its age. The available audio tracks include an impressive English DD5.1 and an English and Italian mono track. The score by Ennio Morricone is also pretty groovy!



Wild lesbian dreams-but are they based in fact ?

**Madness (1993)
Cinema de Bizarre
DVD-R**

Madness aka *Eyes Without a Face* (*Gli occhi dentro*) is a unusual crime thriller by director Bruno Mattei. It was his first attempt at making a giallo film and is surprisingly effective.



It is very hard to find a copy and the edition from Cinema de Bizarre is in English, full screen and of quite reasonable quality. It is the best print available of this extremely rare film and it is good to have it available.

Giovanna, a up-and-coming young comic book artist has created a unique new character Dr.Dark. By day Dark is a professor teaching pagan religions but by night he is a brutal serial killer who copies the ancient methods of the Egyptians. The comics have developed a cult following and achieved notoriety in the media, especially considering that there is a real killer on the loose who seems to be acting out the killings.

Just like in the comics a killer dressed in black with a zippered mask is haunting the streets killing baby-sitters. He visits the ancient Egypt funeral rites on the living by gouging out their eyes, pushing metal prongs through their noses into their brains and leaving the bodies with pieces on glass over the empty eye sockets.

The media pressure against the Dr.Dark comics mount and Giovanna fights against any attempt at censorship arguing for freedom of expression



Trophies for a Killer



Dr.Dark, comic book character and killer ?

and against any connection between literature and those who may pervert it for their own pathology. I especially like her response when the media demands she take responsibility for the killings her comic book has supposedly triggered.

"If they kill someone with a power drill, do they take it out on Black and Decker?"

As the bodies mount-up the police are confused by the twists and turns in the case, it seems the killer is hunting the author leaving strange messages on her phone and perverse little gifts, but perhaps things are not quite as they seem.

This is an impressive giallo with an excellent plot, it has lots of twists and turns including a great anti-climax in the middle when you think the police have caught the killer but obviously they have not. There are lots of flawed characters, all of which could easily be the culprit. *Madness* is bloody; action packed and certainly keeps your attention. The violence is stylized and there are some great murder set-pieces, the flamboyance of the killers modus operandi adds to the flair of the work.

The dialogue is a bit stilted and the acting a bit overwrought but this just adds to the intensity of the tale. While there are similarities to other giallo works such as Argento's *Tenebrae*, Mattei has created a work which has enough unique elements that it really is quite effective.

Mattei's works can be a bit hit and miss but this is really quite a superb thriller which will keep you enthralled right to the very end.

Web: <http://cinema-de-bizarre.com>

**Mission Mars
Collection
Image Entertainment
R1 DVD**

The Mission Mars Collection is a set of 1950's B Grade sci-fi titles - *Flight to Mars* (1951), *Attack From Mars* (1988) and *Invaders From Mars* (1953).



The set opens with *Flight to Mars* (1951), directed by Lesley Selander and including lots of very stilted acting and macho mannerisms, the film is amazingly dialogue heavy but with some rather fun special effects. It tries to be "hard science fiction" including all manner of speculation about space and science but by the time they land on Mars this has all gone out the window.

The plot is about four scientists and a news reporter travelling to Mars on a scientific quest. They find the planet populated by a strangely human-like Martian species with old men who wear strange outfits and girls in very short skirts! While they are at first greeted with friendship and offered the technology to repair their damaged craft, soon they discover a nefarious plot is afoot to their earth's atomic know-how and declare war on earth. With the assistance of Alita and Tillamar, a dissenting member of the Martian government, they are able to repair their ship and return to earth, bringing Alita with them as a wife for Dr. Jim Barker, the leader of the expedition and Tillamar to negotiate for his planet with the earth's government.

The second film in the collection is *Attack From Mars* (1988) and was made as some sort of



The Path to the underground Martian Ship

send-up of 1950's science fiction, to be honest the less said about it the better. I presume it is included in the set as it was the books of Image Entertainment and they weren't sure what to do with it. I certainly would have preferred another Fifties Mars sci fi film in the set, but the other two more than make up for it. So ignore it and watch the others!

Invaders from Mars (1953) is considered a classic of Fifties science fiction entertainment. David Maclean is a young boy obsessed with astronomy and looking out of his window very early one morning sees a flying saucer land and burrow below the ground. His Dad goes to investigate and returns later in the day somehow different. Soon more and more locals are being transformed, each with an X on the back of their neck caused by a brain implant. Soon David is at the centre of a battle between a Martian race and the military who are creating an atomic rocket to travel to space. Filled with Fifties paranoia about communism, mind control, brainwashing and even some reflections on the nature of authority it is an excellent example of Fifties sci fi. There are even some mutants and a cool alien floating head! Included are both the US and UK editions of the film.

Invaders from Mars has a presence which is actually rather endearing. It has some powerful imagery and excellent cinematography for the period. The men in suits as alien mutant slaves might seem dated but when you move past its limitations it is quite successful. The sense of paranoia and fear about communism coupled with an untrammelled adoration for science and atomic energy still communicates well even after fifty years.

The Mission Mars Collection is great value and certainly worth getting hold of.



Supreme Martian Warlord

Outlander
Warner Brothers
R1 DVD

Outlander is a very eccentric and unusual film; it is essentially Beowulf meets science fiction, a sort of Vikings versus Alien tale. Now at first this sounds utterly ridiculous and it would seem hard to take the idea seriously.

Indeed I wonder just how the director sold the concept to a studio, especially considering the obviously high budget special effects and nature of the plot. Yet Outlander works and works extra-ordinarily well.

It is 750 C.E and Kainan, a soldier from another world (and perhaps another time) crash lands in the middle of Norway. The local villages have been attacked by an unknown enemy which leaves them razed to the ground and takes all the bodies. Kainan is found near one of the villages and taken prisoner and brutally interrogated. It becomes obvious, however, that he is not the source of the destruction and he tells a tale of a creature called a Moorwen which has followed him from another world.

Later in the film this story is further refined with a strong environmental message as we find that Kainan's people, needing extra living space, raided the Moorwen's home world, massacring the creatures and taking possession of the planet. Unbeknown to the settlers a small number of the creature's survived in caverns under the planet's surface and at the right moment took their revenge killing the occupants of the settlement. It also seems some of the Moorwen have



escaped to a new world on-board Kainan's spaceship.

On earth, the Moorwen has now found a new territory and begins collecting the local Vikings to add to its food larder. The battle against the creature is complicated by inter-tribal feuds and personality clashes within the tribe. As they lay a trap for the creature, soon it becomes apparent that there is a family group of Moorwen and with the tribe safely away, Kainan, Freya and the warriors of the tribe must face off against the monster once and for all.

This is a truly inventive mixture of myth and science fiction. It takes the Beowulf tale and combines it with religious and speculative themes in a way that is quite compelling. As would be expected there is lots of yelling, fighting, brawling and drinking; the portrayal of the Vikings is evocative and playful. Sure the Vikings are shown in a stereotypical even Clichéd manner but somehow this is used to the advantage rather than detriment of the story. There are some great set pieces which really set the tribal mood ranging from the "shield walk" to some powerful battle scenes.

The cinematography is excellent using the natural environment to create a great sense of the world of the Vikings which works to even further emphasize the alien nature of the creature.

The acting is solid with a great performance from John Hurt and James Caviezel, the plot is complex and includes a range of interesting themes. I especially liked the way that the Moorwen's rage is explained in terms of ecological genocide by Kainan's people. The movement between the Norse Viking elements and the science fiction aspects of the tale are handled well; this is especially notable with the very high quality special effects.

Surprisingly the Beowulf plot is told in a relatively traditional manner simply transforming the nature of the Outlander and the creature. The scenes in the volcanic underworld which combine semi religious underworld like imagery with mythological and science fiction motifs is very innovative.

The plot develops well with a superbly climatic extended final battle scene leading to a traditional Viking funeral and conclusion. This really is an unusual and creative re-invention of a classic tale and offers an excellent dose of Viking science fiction entertainment !



Vikings and Aliens, an unusual mix

Sherlock Holmes (2009) Cinema Release

Robert Downey Jnr and Jude Law offer a spirited interpretation of the roles of Sherlock Holmes and Watson. Filled with wit, wry humour and a touch of male-bonding, it is a joy to watch. Holmes and Watson argue like a married couple and squabble when Watson decides to get married.



(When Downey Jnr made a joke about Sherlock Holmes being a butch homosexual, the estate holding the rights to Sherlock Holmes in the U.S. were so horrified they threatened to withdraw the rights to use the story. Typical conservative over-reaction).

The interplay between Holmes and Watson and the constant fast play of dialog makes this a very intelligent adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes legacy. At the same time the remoulding of Holmes into a very post-modern type of hero is impressive. While a campaigner for rationalism and a dispeller of superstition, he also indulges in sex and drugs, enjoys bare fist boxing and is well trained in martial arts. He looks a mess and lives in decadent squalor, spending his time on all manner of wild entertainment while undertaking experiments on his everything and anything, including his poor dog.

The central plot, meanwhile, involves attempts by a secret brotherhood to take over the world by what is perceived by its members to be mag-

ic after its leader Lord Blackwood apparently rises from the dead after his execution in prison. The secret brotherhood is marvellously portrayed with strange temples and shows a solid bit of research being clearly influenced by both early Freemasonry and the imagery of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The way in which Holmes decodes their "magic" and reveals its basis in science is truly marvellous.

Victorian London is impeccably recreated and the use of CGI and computer effects is striking but subtle. You really feel you are in old London and can smell the dirt and grime. The look of the film, which succeeds due to Philippe Rousselot's cinematography perfectly matching the CGI into real world elements, is matched by an astounding soundtrack by Hans Zimmer. Zimmer combines drums, Irish gigs and broken pianos with a wild array of instruments and styles to create a score which is really worth getting on a CD as well.

There was much debate about the lack of appearance by Doctor Moriarty, but I feel that the plot that revolved around Lord Blackwood is more than enough and leaves room for sequels to expand the storyline. The resolution of the case through rational means without recourse to the supernatural is also a real plus. The rumoured appearance of Brad Pitt as Moriarty will certainly bring in a new dimension to the sequel which is already in development.

It is fair to say that this is a very new retelling of the tale. Holmes and Watson do not have much in common with the original characters and the plot while placed in an old world setting has a very modern feel. All great tales need to change with the times and this is a new and exciting reinterpretation of to very classic characters.



Jude Law as Watson and Robert Downey Jnr as Sherlock Holmes



Holmes - bare chested and ready to fight

Surrogates Disney R4 DVD

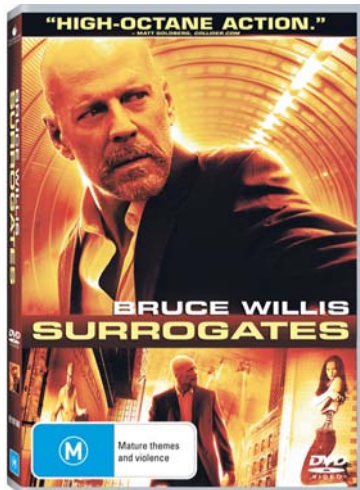
Surrogates is an intelligent and intriguing working of science fiction with Bruce Willis at the lead. There has been much criticism of Willis as being an “over-used” action-star and being beyond his prime. In Surrogates I believe his age actually works for him since he plays a detective jaded with the artificiality of the robotic surrogate he is forced to use and eager to accept his life (and age) for what it is.

Willis plays the role of Detective Greer who while using a surrogate in everyday life feels something has been lost by their use. He does not like the artificiality of using a “robotic mask” and while not siding with the revolutionaries who fight against them appreciates their cause.

In the near future technology has taken the concept of the online presence and matched it with robotics to create robotic humans known as surrogates. They were originally designed for use by the disabled and to resolve issues relating to discrimination. However very quickly they became the consumer item everyone had to have. Soon everyone has one; working, partying, shopping and playing via a robotic surrogate which is encoded with their identity via a ID chip. You stay at home in the safety of your own virtual reality chair while you experience the world through your double.

Since free enterprise has control of the business end, you can choose whatever body you like. Everyone looks young and beautiful and has enhanced abilities. Not everyone is impressed by this development but since the anti-surrogate groups are in a minority they like in their own ghettos and are represented by The Prophet.

Surrogates are built for wear and tear, you can use and abuse them and when they are worn out or destroyed they get replaced. Even destroying a surrogate is simply defined as property damage.



Bruce Willis in Surrogates

But when FBI Agents Greer and Peters are called in to investigate the destruction of two surrogates, they get a real shock. It seems that a high tech weapon has been used that not only blows out the brains of the surrogate but kills its operator was well. The investigation is complicated by the fact that one of the murder victims was the son of Lionel Canter who designed the Surrogates but resigned when he saw that they would be used as machines for entertainment rather than for the greater good.

Mixing together an interesting debate about the limits of technology with a detective tale this is an impressive sci-fi story. There are all sorts of themes within this film ranging from addictions to technology, the role of big business in policing and the acceptance of diversity including old age and death.

Bruce Willis as the jaded cop and James Cromwell as Lionel Carter are stand-out characters, but all the acting is solid. We could criticize The Prophet played by Ving Rhames as being two-dimensional and sounding like a madman. But when we later realize he is a surrogate manipulated for political purposes his bizarre dialog comes to have significance within terms of the greater conspiracy. The sub plot about Greer's emotional difficulties with his wife over the death of their child is well told and explains why someone may escape into the world of a surrogate.

The CGI and special effects are well done and Surrogates while not perfect explores some fascinating themes in an effective manner.

The Box Icon Home Entertainment Blu Ray

Richard Kelly is an enigmatic and challenging filmmaker. After directing a number of shorts, he created the truly eccentric cult masterpiece *Donnie Darko*.



Donnie Darko is a film which has continued to challenge and confound and become a highly respected, if not controversial, cult classic. Kelly followed *Donnie Darko* with *Southland Tales* (2006), which was sadly not well received by the critics or at the box office.

The Box (2009) continues to explore the themes that Kelly finds of interest and is marked by his own eccentric view of the world. At the same time it is a return to form and in my mind a resounding success. The cinematography is gorgeous, the characters nuanced and the plot mysterious. Kelly never creates a linear story and his films can be understood on many different levels, it is much the same with *The Box*.

The film is set in the Seventies as Kelly wanted to give the original short story "Button, Button" by sci-fi great Richard Matheson a solid grounding in reality. He has taken his father's experiences in NASA and his mother's health issues to weave a tale which melds together a very real world with a dark tale about morality. Early one morning before the sun rises a parcel is left



The Dilemma of the Box



Everything has its price...

on the doorstep of Norma and Frank Lewis (Cameron Diaz and James Marsden).

It includes a strange and unusual locked box and a note stating that Mr. Steward will call on them at 5pm. At precisely 5pm Arlington Steward (Frank Langella) arrives with the key. He is well dressed, suave and clearly a man of great wit and wisdom, however he is marked by half of his face having been burnt away.

He pays Norma \$100 for her time and advises the rules of the game of which she has twenty four hours to play. If she presses the box's red button she will receive a million dollars but someone in the world they do not know will die.

There are restrictions on the money she receives; they must not ask who is controlling the game, discuss the game outside themselves or try and communicate with the police or authorities.

The first section of the film develops the characters of Norma and Frank; we get inside their heads and come to appreciate the pressures they are under. Norma has a deformed foot, has lost the subsidy for her son at the school at which she works and Frank has been refused astronaut training at NASA due to failing a psych evaluation. These early explorations in character lead, of course, to Norma pushing the button. They are sceptical about what will happen next as Frank has opened the box and cannot see any communicate device attached to it. However, the next day the enigmatic Arlington Steward arrives and the cash is delivered. They have second thoughts but it is too late.



The Box: A test but who or what from ?

Things now get very strange. When Frank tries to find out more about Arlington Steward, Norma receives a phone call warning them off. It seems he has spies everywhere and moreover is able to use some method of mind control to make others do his will. The only sign they are under his control is a noise bleed after they have been used to fulfilled his need.

As the story unfolds it is superbly complex and mysterious, ranging from hints about alien intelligences to Sartre's commentary on the earth being purgatory. We are left confused as to what exactly the Lewis' are up against and this makes the tale even more enjoying. It does become clear that the human race is being tested but exactly by who or what is left up to us to decide. The ramifications of Norma's decision to push the button are worse than she ever imagined and the final scenes are confronting and powerful. It seems whoever is creating these tests is "taking no prisoners" and the hints at further stages in the process is left ominously hanging in the air.

Even at the end of the film it is hard to decipher the exact meaning of what you have seen and this makes it a very different form of cinema.

Some people will find the lack of conclusiveness in *The Box* (and indeed in most of Kelly's films) difficult, I find it challenging and thought provoking.

In *The Box* Kelly takes religious themes about altruism, suffering and redemption and takes them outside of their normal genre and expresses them in a new and provocative way. This makes *The Box* a truly fascinating cinematic experience.

The Thaw Sony R4 DVD

The Thaw is a different sort of horror or thriller, it is based on an ecological threat and takes current fears about climate change and moulds them into an intriguing plot. While it shows its influences from a range of classic sci-fi and horror films including John Carpenter's *The Thing*, *Bugs* and *The Last Winter* it creates a unique enough tale to make it quite an impressive work of cinema in its own right.



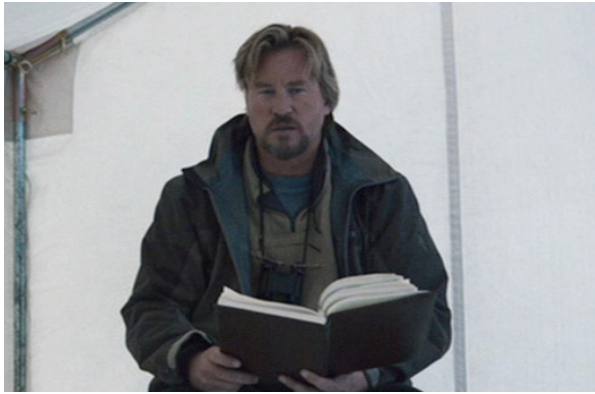
Dr. David Kruipen (Val Kilmer) and his team discover a woolly mammoth thawing in the Canadian Arctic. To their shock they also find an ancient parasite that has been hibernating in the animal for thousands of years, soon it spreads to other animals and then into the team. At first they are not sure how much at risk they are but as they study the bugs they realize the deadly nature of the parasite and the danger it poses.

As team members die Kruipen makes a terrible decision. He has been fighting for ecological causes all his life and the pace of change is way too slow to save the planet, accordingly he decides to infect himself so he can spread the infection to the outside world. He hopes the panic engendered by the infection will bring about a modicum of environmental awareness.

Soon a helicopter flies in a group of students and Kruipen's daughter Evelyn to the camp. He has tried to keep Evelyn away from the camp but she is stubborn and difficult, a bit like her father. They are a motley group of students, not immediately likable. Atom is intelligent if not a little ideologically extreme, Federi-



Frederico and Ling, Bug attack



Val Kilmer as Dr. David Kruipen, an environmentalist driven to extreme action by global warming

co is a rather unlikable sort of "survive at all costs" sort of guy with a phobia about bugs and Ling has little character and hence we know she will die early. Bart, the helicopter pilot, is the tough guy.

Of course the major focus is the bugs and they are pretty impressive. There are lots of gory and gooy moments and if you have any problems with small creepy things then don't watch this film. Bugs crawling in and out of people, bears covered in bugs, decomposing bodies, they are in depicted in graphic detail. An especially awful scene is when Federico and Ling get down with it and she ends up infected and he ends up with a bug in his dick.

The plot is credible, the acting believable and the combination of excellent CGI with good cinematography makes it visually impressive.

I did feel there was somewhat of a mixed message in the plot. On one level it condemns Dr. David Kruipen for his willingness to use eco-terrorism as a means to communicate his message, yet at the same time acknowledges that mankind does not seem to be able or willing to change. At times the environmental message is a little strident, but on a whole it is a very makes this is different sort of thriller.



Bart is infected

Twisted Bedtime Stories Vamp Productions R1 DVD

Twisted Bedtime Stories is trashy, silly and loads of fun. It is a series of seven short films made by a diverse range of indie filmmakers. The films vary in genre from the funny to the strange, artistic to cult.



The collection opens with *The Monkey Movie* which is a silent film set to 1930's style jazz music. It is a quirky tale of an ape which goes berserk trying to return to girls mobile phone only to find they fall in love.

Joan of Arc stars the cult superstar Lloyd Kaufman (of Troma) and is wear retelling of a significant episode in the life of Joan of Arc is exploitation cinema style. Poor old Joan, gets sexually assaulted when forced to dress as a woman in prison and then assaulted again by monks when she dressed as a nun. Tasteless and lots of fun. *Helen 2 Pay* asks a very simple question? What would you do if your high school rival came under your total control.

The Last Days of Rick Mortis is a re-working of the morality tale, this time with a relationship which is doomed to fail between a glam rocker and a zombie.

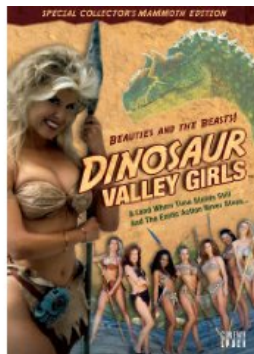
Salome is a classic Biblical epic, retold in ever so many films. This retelling comes in the form of a highly stylized art film with an electro score and an all-female cast. *Church 4 Sale* continues the all-girl theme with a shocking and ghastly tale of a lesbian break-up.

KOMaKINO "Slide" is a music video which has combines an impressive electro sound reminiscent of Pink Floyd with deep and meaningful cinematography which tells the tale of a brother and sister who enter a snow covered forest and find they have been there all their lives.

This is an interesting mix of short films which certainly keep you interest offering a wide and diverse range of indie content.

Vamp Productions
Web: <http://www.alexiaanastasio.com>

Dinosaur Valley Girls
Frontline
Entertainment
R1 DVD



Dinosaur Valley Girls is a B grade extravaganza which combines "Harry Harryhausen" like dinosaurs, a celebrity parody and lots of cavewomen in skimpy outfits. It is a mixture of a lost in the Jungle film with the sexy feel of Women of the Amazon cinema with a dose of sci fi and some celebrity humour to boot.

Tony is an action based film star, he is a bit beyond his prime and his martial arts career is failing. He is preparing to star in Feet of Fury Four but is plagued by strange visions and dreams. These dreams feature a very silly looking dinosaur and a sexy cavewoman, they interfere with his life day and night and worse compel him to repeat strange phrases.

Tony's life is even more complicated by his whining girlfriend who is with him just because she hopes he can get her "a small part" in one of his films. His constant smoking has also taken its toll and his martial arts skills are fading fast. His sensei keeps kicking his butt at the dojo and the celebrity reports on his future are not that great.

He decides to go to a local museum to learn more about his dinosaur fixation and sees a large beastly that looks like the one in his dream. After holding an ancient Talisman in his hand and issuing forth his inane desire to find the dinosaur woman of his dreams, he is transported to Dinosaur Valley, a land where humans and dinosaurs lived side by side.

Dinosaur Valley is populated by rather hairy and stupid cavemen and lovely cavewoman who wander around in skimpy outfits. They are far more intelligent than the men and take a liking to the clear shaven Tony. They do have their problems however, I especially like the scene when a dinosaur attacks and rather than eating or killing Hea-thor the cave woman it simply tears off her top and knocks her out.

This is fun and silly entertainment filled with beasts, sexy girls and breasts; it has reasonable acting, good looking sets and dinosaurs which range from animatronic models to what are ob-

viously lizards. At times it is so kitsch and ridiculous you will laugh yourself silly.

The DVD included both a Director's Cut and a Family Edition. Extras includes everything from music videos, a cave-English diction to New Cave girl Pin Ups and commentaries.

Available from Amazon.com

Family Guy
Something, Something,
Something Darkside
Fox (2009)
R1/R4 DVD



OK, we all know the storyline. This one-hour show follows on from their earlier spoof of the first Star Wars and once again puts the Griffin family into the familiar Star Wars roles. The parodies of the original film's characters are well done with enough original joke material to stop this cartoon being just a copy of Star Wars. That's the main problem with this type of show – we DO all know the storyline and we know what to expect in the plot. If we also know the Family Guy characters then there's not much left to explore once we get used to the combination.

With the plot already known, it's hard for this sort of show to maintain the momentum. This one, however, has a pretty good try at it. Although most of the jokes are the simple one-liners and sarcasm that the Americans love, there is enough of it that sooner or later you start to get that lift in your mood that means that the film has got to you. I must admit I was surprised. Such derivative shows don't always reach that point.

I am not a great fan of Family Guy but I have seen enough of it to be comfortable with the characters. Set in a different environment like this film, I thought they were funnier than the rather repetitive TV show. There are some interesting extras, and the disk features a version ready to transfer to computer or other media.

Give it a try. It's lightweight entertainment but there are some good laughs in it.

Lesbian Vampire Killers
Warner Bros
R4 DVD

Lesbian Vampire Killers is a comedy combining a campy sense of style with a sharp wit and lots of film references. Clearly influenced by Hammer Horror and the bevy of lesbian vampire films including *Vampyres*, *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Daughters of Darkness*, the film doesn't take itself too seriously.

The humour is a bit hit-and-miss and ranges from schoolboy crass to sight gags and physical humour, but on the whole it work fairly well. The dialog is fairly fast paced and certainly includes some amusing one liner...

"..even dead women would rather sleep each other than with me"

"....his heart's in the right place but it's just a shame his brain is in his dick".

To really appreciate this film you really have to have a love of campy horror films and be willing to play along with some of the more ridiculous aspects of the tale. Sure, this is not the most refined of comedy, but it works for what it and if you don't expect too much you will find it amusing.

The film opens with a traditional vampire tale. There is a great evil vampire who is turning all the women in the villages into vampires and worse, into lesbians. While nobody has any suc-



Ready for Battle against the Lesbian foe

cess destroying her power, a great vampire hunter finally, with the help of a secret occult text, is able to make a sword which lops off his head. However, just as she dies she slashes his chest and curses the village. From that time onwards every young girl in the village becomes a lesbian when she turns 18 and a vampire to boot!

While these event unfold in the village of Cragwich, Jimmy is dumped by his girlfriend for the seventh time and his mate Fletch suggests they get away for a holiday.

Since they are both broke Jimmy suggests they go hiking and in a dose of drunken revelry they randomly choose a location on the map and land in, you guessed it, Cragwich.

As the tale unfolds, we met a group of young Swedish girls studying folklore, a bevy of lesbian vampires, a priest with a filthy mouth and other more or less entertaining characters. The story is fairly obvious with Jimmy ending up as the descendant of the lesbian vampire-killing knight and a great battle unfolding between the lesbian vampires and the gallant pair.

There are lots of beheadings and killings, messy special effects (the vampires melt into a pile of white goo) and mayhem. The gore level is fairly high only matched by the constant girl on girl action. The plot and characters are not what you would consider well developed with the story becoming a bit confused at times.

Lesbian Vampire Killers may be lightweight but it is lots of fun and will certainly prove a good laugh to those brought up on Hammer Horror and classic horror.



Lesbian Vampires in Action

Mel Brooks Collection
Fox DVD
Blu Ray Collection
Region A

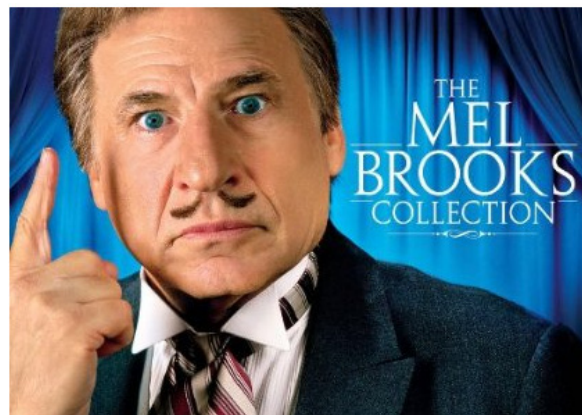
The Mel Brooks collection is a superbly presented boxed set which includes nine major Mel Brooks' films: *Blazing Saddles*, *Spaceballs*, *Young Frankenstein*, *High Anxiety*, *History Of The World Part 1*, *Robin Hood Men In Tights*, *Silent Movie*, *To Be Or Not To Be* and *Twelve Chairs*. It includes a large full colour hardback book which documents each film and slides into the box and each film is remastered and presented in the best possible format with all sorts of nice extras.

The choice of films is a little strange, Brooks has made some eleven films so Fox seem to have chosen nine which they have available. Some are significant comedies such as *Young Frankenstein* and *Blazing Saddles*, while others such as *Spaceballs* and *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* are of marginal interest. Rather than going through film by film I will simply comment on a few that piqued my interest.

Blazing Saddles stands out in my mind as one of his most superb comedies and is considered by many one of the most important of all parody films. It is such a send-up of the great "American" western, turning what was a macho film genre tradition into a politically incorrect on-slaughter. Brooks packed in every possible gag, sexual subtext and constant double-entendres to make a film which still stands out as a great work of cinematic subversion.

Young Frankenstein is another Brooks' success story and is really a fairly faithful adaptation of the Son of Frankenstein (1939) adding in elements from other classic Frankenstein films. It is probably the most narrative of Brooks' films following a very traditional plot and works exceptionally well. In my mind it stands against some of his later films such as *Spaceballs* which are dismal mainstream comedies filled with fluff but little plot.

History of the World, Part I is really the Brooks extravaganza, he wrote, directed and produced it and also created the lyrics for many of the songs and appeared in five roles. This process was a bit of "over-reach" and while it is a marvellously funny comedy is rather uneven. It is really more like a TV show with a series of sketches of episodes than a coherent movie. It was not that well received, but did make a profit



becoming a much loved cult comedy over time. The film is divided into five main segments: "The Dawn of Man," "The Old Testament," "The Roman Empire," "The Spanish Inquisition," and "The French Revolution." The Roman section is a major focus and rather successful (I love Dom Deluise). "The Spanish Inquisition", taking some inspiration from Monty Python I suggest, offers one of the most unusual song and dance numbers ever seen on screen.

To Be or Not To Be is quite a surprise. I did not especially warm to it the first time but watching it again it has a surprising level of heart matched with the comedy. It mixes musical numbers with a quirky if not biting sense of humour and its ability to ridicule fascists and racists within a comedy setting works well.

There are nine films in all and as a collection, it offers an interesting selection of Brooks' comedies including many of his best and some rather mediocre titles, but it is good to have them in one set.

The Blu Ray picture quality is excellent and while these films were clearly made pre high definition a good job has been done to get the most from older film stock. The sound remixes vary greatly, I am never really that sure about trying to reprocess older mono movies into DD5.1, it seems artificial and forced. It is a matter to taste I supposed so try the different settings for each film and make up your own mind. Certainly a reasonable job has been done with the mixing but with the earlier titles such as *Blazing Saddles* I enjoyed the sound as it was originally created.

These are six new featurettes featuring interviews with Brooks and many others and as well as added material such as a tribute to Ann Bancroft, the book is comprehensive including lots of press photographs and rare memorabilia.

**The Norman Gunston Show
The Best Of The Last
Show 4
Channel 7 Network
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4**

Norman Gunston first made his appearance in the 1970s in The Auntie Jack Show, in which he penned the immortal Wollongong The Brave., the anthem to the Illawarra coal mining town. With the show's demise he was spun off into a show of his own on the Australian national broadcaster ABC where he ruthlessly parodied the self-important Australian TV interviewers of the time.

This DVD has the last two shows of the final Series 4 when the show had been translated to commercial TV on the Channel 7 Network, and shows Gunston at his best (worst?). All the characteristics are there – the tasteless questions, the lack of preparation, shaving ability and self-confidence, even the “accidental” insults to his guests. Even Prime Minister Paul Keating and his wife Anita came in for the Gunston treatment.

There was always the risk that some of his guests may not know that they were part of a parody but most picked this up quickly. Many went with it to produce interviews where Norman and his guest were happily bouncing jokes of each other. Brian Austen Green of popular American TV show Beverly Hills 90210 handled his side of the interview well and seemed to be enjoying Norman's gaffes.

*“What do you look for in a girl?
Besides the usual things...”
“You mean like a heartbeat?”*

Australian guests fared better since Norman was by now a household name and they knew what to expect. Beautifully-groomed longhaired footballer Warwick Capper and his equally beautiful wife for instance copped all sorts of embarrassing questions of the sort that would have them walking off the set of any other interview show.

“Before we begin, there's one thing I want to clear up – which one of youse is Warwick?” They took it all in good grace and handled it well.



Norman Gunston and Sam Niell

Not all the viewing audience felt the same way. A number of people I knew at the time thought the show was insulting or crude and should be taken off. Even when I explained to them that it was a satire and not meant to be taken seriously, they still found it offensive. Fortunately the 7 Network stuck with the show despite the complaints. Most Australians were mature and intelligent enough to see the show for what it was.

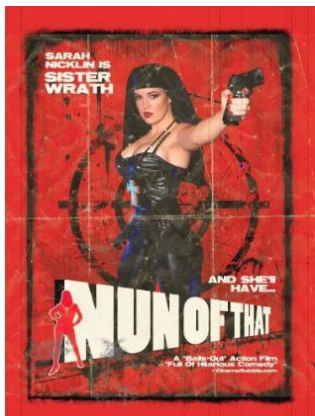
By this time Norman was doing the roving worldwide reporter thing, interviewing overseas, and the studio end was being handled by Mary Coustas in her caricature role as Effie Stefanides, the Greek tart with the very large hair. She handled the Gunston-type questions very well but with just as little taste as Norman would have. Less successful was another character, Kylie Mole, who was simply irritating. Even Kylie worked well with singer Peter Andre, however.

Effie and Norman even provided their signature duets in these last shows. Amigos Para Siempre will never be the same. The style and music were there but the singing talent wasn't.

Technically the quality ranges from good (in the studio shots) to abysmal (in the Billy Crystal interview). With only two shows on the DVD I felt a bit ripped off, but the extras are interesting and help bring back the memories of the show. At a time when TV interviewers like Ray Martin were being over-promoted, Norman Gunston was a refreshing change. He showed that Australians could laugh at themselves.

**Nun of That
Camp Motion
Pictures
All Region NTSC**

Nun of That is a marvellously camp, outrageous and bloody comedy which combines grindhouse cult cinema with lots of bad taste humour. If you are religious certainly keep away, Nun of that exploits every kind of religious joke it can find and then some more.



Hidden behind the gaze of mere mortals there is a secret order of nuns known as The Order of the Black Habit. It is divinely appointed vigilante squad which fulfils the Lord's work by despatching irredeemable criminals to an early grave by any means possible. When one of their team is killed during a shoot-out at a local sex club as part of an operation to bring down crime boss, Momma Rizzo, a replacement must be found.

Sister Kelly is a nun with a very bad temper. She has beaten up a fellow nun for one too many unwanted advances (though she is a lesbian herself) and belted up a priest for sexually harassing a 14 year old girl in confession. She has been relegated to a rough nunnery as punishment.

On the way she is attacked and during an attempted rape kills her three attackers. Suddenly three nuns appear out of nowhere and shoot her, transporting her to heaven where she meets singing and dancing son of God who explains her new role.

She is to be a nun in the Order of the Black Habit and will return to earth as Sister Wraith. In Heaven she is trained in killing skills by Gandhi



Order of the Black Habit in session



A Nun with an Attitude (and a pistol)

and Moses (and some advice from Jesus) and now ready to kick ass she returns to earth.

She joins a squad of equally outrageous nuns including Sister Lust and Sister Gluttony. It seems that since these nuns have committed mortal sins they can do no wrong and so work for heaven doing the things no one else can do. The plot is surreal including an a doublecross, a Jewish assassin, a crime lord who has a pact with the devil and enough general weirdness to make the head spin.

Filled to the brim with every possible nunsplotation cliché, this is superb cult cinema. There are religious jokes, lots of smutty humour, lesbian nuns, gore and violence and everything else one could hope for, there is even a musical number. There is a Jewish mobster killer called Viper who adds some good old Jewish jokes into the mix and angels and demons pop in to make an appearance as well. We get even Lloyd Kaufman of Troma as the Pope !

Some of the scenes are superb comedic set pieces, the Barnun where nuns meet to unwind and get drunk is just too much, especially when they all get into a brawl.

There are even some observations about the patriarchal basis of Catholicism along the way !

Nun of That is a low budget campfest; filled with outrageous humour and is an absolute scream from beginning to end.

Nun of That is available from Alternative Cinema, while you are there have a look at their great range of other titles.

Web: <http://www.alternativecinema.com/>

The Vampires of Bloody Island Wibbell Productions PAL All Regions

Pamela Kempthorne and her husband Allin wrote and star in campy and low-budget so-bad-it-is-good British vampire comedy *The Vampires of Bloody Island*. This is a film which is obviously a work of love and has clearly taken a lot of dedication to make, it may be an indie low budget film but that shouldn't put you off. It has a great sense of humour and while it isn't perfect, it is bloody good fun.

It is a film influenced by the old Hammer horror titles of the Seventies mixed with all sorts of weird and strange characters and lots of exploding vampires. The dialogue is witty, the acting reasonable and the look of the film is actually rather impressive for a movie made on a low budget.

There is an island off the South coast of Cornwall, called Bloody Island. In the nearby village of Bloody Bay the fearful inhabitants never speak it's name, yet as they glance across the bay each night, they lock their doors, say their prayers and hang out fresh protective strings of garlic. For Bloody Island is an evil place. Yes, Bloody Island is the home to vampires and werewolves... and virgins!

In a crumbling castle clinging to the islands jagged rocks, the Vampire noblewoman Morticia de'Ath, and her henchman, a rebuilt corpse named Grunt, are concocting a sinister plan. Aided by the misguided alchemist, Doctor N. Sane, Morticia aims to discover the magical cure to finally enable all vampires to be immune



Morticia de'Ath from *The Vampires of Bloody Island*

from the fatal touch of sunlight!

However, one essential ingredient remains missing, an ingredient only available from an innocent, unknowing and not very popular office girl living in faraway London, Susan Swallows.

Morticia orders the long-suffering Grunt to lure Susan and her chauvinistic work-mate Kevin Smallcock, to Bloody Island. On their journey via the deeply superstitious village of Bloody Bay and an ancient Cornish stone circle, the 'Devil's Lookout', Susan becomes increasingly unnerved by the bizarre characters they encounter and the growing sense that her own past and identity are not as she had previously thought.

Meanwhile, across the water on Bloody Island, Morticia and Grunt are preparing a demonic dinner party to ensnare their unwitting guests, unaware of a man about to cross their paths, lay waste to Morticia's evil plans (hopefully) and make heroes of Kevin and Susan (crossed fingers!) Professor Hans Van Rental, ex-window cleaner and fearless vampire hunter.

The resulting mayhem involves a heavily one-sided pitched battle, with Morticia's well armoured one hundred strong vampire army set against Susan, Kevin and the Professor. It is a battle, not only for the eternal safety of all humankind, but also some very important personal issues for Susan.

If you like your horror coupled with laughs, if you miss the old British low-budget vampire films of the Hammer days, if you want to see the film that is already being hailed as a "cult classic", then you will very much enjoy *The Vampires of Bloody Island*.

Web: <http://www.wibbell.co.uk>



Grunt from *The Vampires of Bloody Island*

Alyas Batman en Robin (1993)
Trash Palace
DVD-R

Alyas Batman en Robin is an unauthorized 1993 Filipino musical comedy directed by Tony Y. Reyes and produced by Regal Films. It is a parody of the 1960s Batman television series starring comedian Joey de Leon as Batman, he is a very popular Filipino comedian and television presenter who has been involved in various spoofs including *Sheman: Mistress of the Universe* and the *Starzan* films, he has also penned some very successful Filipino hit songs included *Boyfriend kong Baduy* (My Geeky Boyfriend) and *Iskul Bukol* (School Lump).



Keempee Reyeshis plays Robin and Dawn Zulueta as Wonder Woman. There are a range of Batman's traditional enemies including The Joker, The Penguin, who are portrayed respectively by Filipino comedians Rene Requiestas and Panchito Alba.

The film is a very madcap comedy and doesn't take itself seriously, ranging from the strange sets (including Batman movie posters in the Bat Cave) to the musical numbers. The score to the film has to be heard to be believed; the songs include "Pretty Woman," "Let's Go To The Hop," and "Surfin' USA," with modded lyrics such as Holy cow, Batman and Robin!"

The film is slow to start but as it gets going it is truly insane. The Caped Crusaders are broth-

ers who live in Manila. The older brother lives in a mansion which looks well; have a look at the art and make up your mind. The young brother is a local sports hero adored by all the girls and who likes to run around shirtless to keep their attention up. Their life is made a misery as Manila is scandalized by brazen attacks by three very, very evil villains - The Joker, The Penguin and Cat Women. At the same time these villains while obviously evil seem to have a damn good time, they like to break into song, even when robbing banks !

Alyas Batman en Robin is a superbly silly and camp Batman send-up. It does everything absolutely wrong and this just makes it work all the better. The soundtrack sounds like it has been recorded from a cheap tape deck, the costumes are suitably dreadful and the fight scenes are truly embarrassing. What is most amusing is that all these elements look like they have been filmed on a home camera in locations owned by friends or relatives and at times public places. This gives the whole film a truly surreal film, an obviously low budget film yet with a look and feel of reality.

This is certainly one of the most unusual Batman films you will ever see and every minute is a marvellous surprise. While it is in Tagalog with some English and doesn't come with subtitles, don't worry too much, it is very visual and easy to follow !

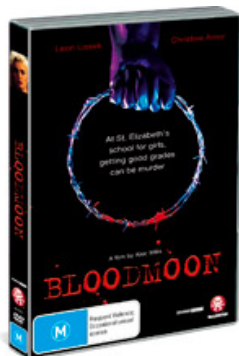


A very strange Joker and Penguin

Web: <http://www.trashpalace.com>

**Blood Moon
Madman
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

Blood Moon (1990) directed by Alec Mills is one of those over-the-top late Eighties exploitation slashers, which in many ways fits perfectly within the Ozploitation genre. Filled to the brim with breasts, dated Eighties clothing, interschool rivalry and passion driven angst it is a movie which has dated so badly it has become hysterically hilarious, combining a slasher with what is essentially a badly directed teen story.



There are randy boys, passionate girls, over protective parents, a neurotic nun, a nympho teacher and her disturbed husband; the characters are everything one would expect from the genre but exaggerated to a level which has to be seen to be believed.

Someone is killing the students at an elite Catholic girls' school run by a dysfunctional married couple. Myles and Virginia Sheffield clearly have a difficult relationship; Virginia likes to have a very close relationship with boys from the local private school while her husband is seemingly impotent and driven to rage. At the same time there is an ongoing rivalry between the local town boys, who come from public schools, and the supposedly refined students of Winchester. Soon these interests are brought into conflict when, you guessed it, a town boy has a fling with a upscale girl.

It is terribly predictable and a really very silly, the dances, clothes and acting are really too



Slaughtering naughty schoolgirls in Blood Moon



Virginia Sheffield takes a special interest in a local lad

much but the murders do add some panache and are rather gory fun.

The sexual dynamics create some intrigue with all manner of affairs explored in typical exploitation fashion, but it really did not reach achieve the success of other Ozploitation titles of the period. *Blood Moon* was featured in *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild, Untold Story of Ozploitation* (2008)

It is fun to note that when this film was first released theatrically in Australia, it included a William Castle-like "Fright Break". This gimmick was nothing more than a intermission which gave audiences a chance to follow a yellow line marked in the cinema to the exit, if the film was too frightening for them, to get their money back !

While a minor film within the history of Aussie exploitation cinema, it is nice to have a good quality edition on DVD.



Typical horror motif, those who make out get killed first !

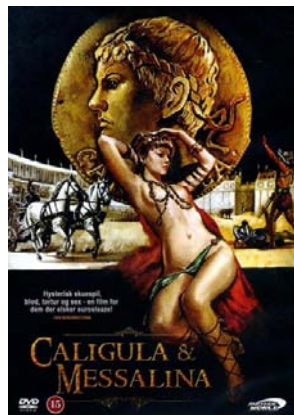
Bruno Mattei
Caligula and
Messalina
R2 DVD
(E)

Bruno Mattei has been called the “Ed Wood” of Italian sleaze cinema and not without good reason. During the Sixties he learnt his trade by working under other Italian directors as an editor and his first directorial experience was in the creation of around half an hour of XXX footage for Jess Franco’s explosive 1969 classic *99 Women*.

His first full length films were *SS Girls* (1977) aka *Private House for the SS* and *SS Extermination Love Camp* (1977), he certainly had a thing for exploitation. These were followed by a couple of Nunsplottation titles including *The Other Hell* (1980) and *The Nun of Monza* (1981). His best known work is his horror classic *Hell of the Living Dead* (1980).

In 1928 he released *Caligula’s Perversions* aka *Caligula and Messalina* to cash in on the notoriety of Tinto Brass’s Penthouse 1979 movie ‘*Caligula*’. The uncut edition is around 111 minutes but is hard to find, the generally available edition is soft-core and around 97 minutes, the difference is primarily hard-core sex. The laser universe edition from Germany is uncut but out of print, the Another World Entertainment edition from Denmark comes in at 97 minutes.

John Turner plays the insane Roman Emperor Caligula, who commits incest with his sisters, rapes a nearly married couple, turns his horse into a member of the Senate, and kills anyone



he perceives as a threat. Messalina (played by the attractive but acting challenged Betty Roland) has been trained sexually by her mother and waits her chance to get her hands on the emperor. When his slutty sisters are exiled, she proves her strength in a gladiatorial match and makes it into the emperor’s bed.

While the film explores all manner of Caligula’s excess, it also moves past his execution to Messalina’s relationship with the new emperor Claudius and her obvious infidelities.

While there have been many good quality B grade “Roman films” this is not the best of them. *Caligula* by Tinto Brass or even Joe D’Amato’s *Caligula II: The Untold Story* are really far better. This is very low budget with terrible acting and most scenes created simply as an excuse for showing all sorts of sex. Now there is nothing wrong with that but it does make the more readily “cut” edition fairly useless. It is a shame really as many other Mattei titles show a lot more flair, but it is still interesting to see.

After making *Caligula and Messalina*, he moved onto make two rather superior Women-in-Prison films starring the beautiful Laura Gemser. His later horror films *Rats: Night of Terror* (1983), and *Zombie 3* (1988) with Lucio Fulci were even more successful. He continued to make films until his last title *Zombies: The Beginning* in 2007. He passed away in the same



A very close Mother and Daughter



A very average portrayal of Caligula

Gestapo's Last Orgy
(1977)
Unrated Edition
Another World
Entertainment
R2 DVD
(M)



Gestapo's Last Orgy (L'ultima orgia del III Reich) is considered the epitome of Nazisploitation cinema.

Most editions on the market have been censored, but the current release from Another World Entertainment (Denmark) is fully uncut and in surprisingly good shape.

It opens with a pretence of history as a car drives into the countryside while a voice-over recounts the extremes of Nazi atrocities. Soon we meet Lise Cohen who is re-uniting with her S.S. Commandant lover, Conrad von Starker after many years. It seems he has somehow escaped Allied justice, though clearly being a war criminal.

As she sees a rusted harmonica on the ground, her memory strays to her time in the camp and the sleaze begins. Her tale is told in flashback with explicit set pieces and lots of bizarrely exaggerated dialogue. Indeed it is the dialogue which makes this film so totally (and probably unwittingly) hilarious. It is packed with conversations, all of which are so exaggerated and so clichéd that they are truly hysterical, the constant dabble about the Aryan master race is so extreme it actually gives the film a sense of humour.

The plot resolves about Lise Cohen who is trying to survive in a Nazi concentration camp which is run as a brothel to keep the troops satisfied before they are sent back to the front. The



Lise is in trouble when she says she doesn't fear death



Lise is tortured and pushed to her limits

camp is run by Commandant Starker and his sadistic female offside who not only use the Jewish woman as sex slaves but torture, rape and abuse them in every possible way.

Starker, however, becomes obsessed with Lise when she shows no emotion no matter how much she is tortured and soon a strange sado-masochistic relationship develops between them as Starker pushes her limits trying to break her. Starker does not realize that she is using him and the climax of the film shows Lise getting her final revenge.

Cesare Canevari certainly takes the genre to an extreme in this sleaze fest pushing every possible limit, especially those of good taste. Set pieces range from throwing a menstruating woman to a pack of wild dogs, a cannibalistic feast, torture by lime and an orgy scene where the nude soldiers fart and carry on before proceeding to rape a group of prisoners.

All sorts of war imagery is used and misused from gloves made of baby skin to panties made of hair collected from Jewish girls. The notorious cannibal feast is absolutely incredible combining bizarre conversations about using the Jews as a food source for the German population with the flambéing of a Jewish girl with liquor !

The torture scenes are a literal smorgasbord of sado-masochism from whippings and beltings through to being hung upside down over a glass box of wild rats. There is lots of nudity but generally the film is not that explicit except for a sex scene between Lise and the doctor which is relatively short.

The AWE is one of the best on the market, nicely cleaned up with excellent picture and sound, it is fully uncut and includes an alternate ending.

Hanna D
The Girl from
Vondel Park
Severin Films
R1 DVD

Uli Edel's exploitation classic *Christiane F.*, which tracks a young girl's descent into addiction and self-destruction took the market by storm in 1984 and triggered many exploitation filmmakers to try their hand at a more modern form of sleaze cinema. Many tried but few succeeded, one who did was Rino De Silvestro of *Women in Cell Block 7* fame. He took a tale of family dysfunction and madness leading to prostitution, sex, violence and drug addiction weaving in every possible element of sleaze and exploitation. Of course the tale includes a redemptive ending with love triumphing over addiction and exploitation but it is a superbly filthy road to get there!

Hanna D (played marvellous by actress Ann Gisel Glass) is working on a train to Amsterdam. She is a young girl plying her wares in any form she can, from being a living peepshow to sex. She is a mixture of innocence and perversity, both the exploiter and the exploited, and De Silvestro is able to explore this throughout the film through very impressive cinematography, lots of nudity, a jazzy lounge score and getting credible performances from actors which are working in a genre not known for its cinematic excellence.

Hanna lives with her drunken unstable mother and her mother's toy boy who seems more interested in Hanna than her mum. As family dysfunction drives Hanna further and further into prostitution and drugs, she meets Miguel who works as her pimp getting her into adult film. Along the way we come to experience the underbelly of Amsterdam with graphic depic-



Injecting where no-one can see

tions of prostitution, drug use, abuse and violence from biker fights to hooker-on-hooker clashes, suicides to bashings.

Of course while Hanna is enjoying the cash (and Miguel getting his share), things do not last as she meets Axel (Sebastiano Somma) on a bus, and falls instantly in love, as you do. As a showdown looms with accelerating violence from Miguel against her mother as he searches for his Hanna who is in hiding, she withdraws further and further into drug addiction. Lust, love and money never quite mix and soon Alex and Miguel must face-off with Hanna's life in the balance.

This is certainly a compelling work of exploitation cinema, Silvestro has taken his "Euro trash" film know-how and created a truly sleazy tale of the rotten streets of Amsterdam. There is lots of sex, nudity, violence, drug action and sordid imagery which helps sustain the authenticity of the tale. The high quality uncut and restored edition offered by Severin from original vault elements is amazing, it is astoundingly clear with very clear dialogue and a rare groovy score.

A great extra is the Confessions of Rino D which is an all new interview/documentary discussing all aspects of the film, it runs around 40 minutes.



Hanna's mad mother



Aimless, lost and hopelessly addicted

Thundercrack! Another World Entertainment R0 DVD

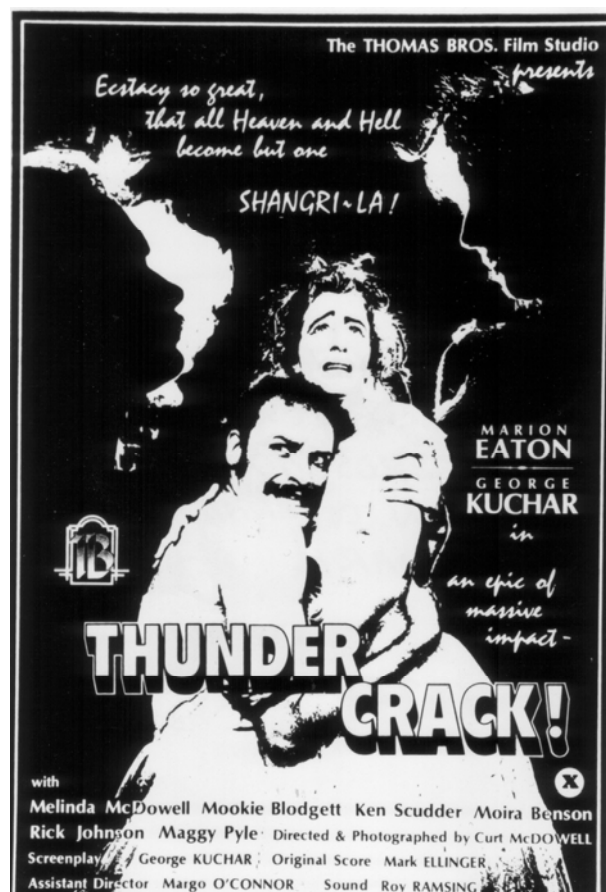
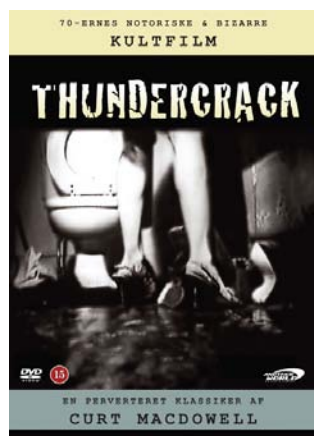
Thundercrack! is a film that stands on its own in the history of cult cinema; it is the only bi-sexual X rated horror cult porn film ever made. *Thundercrack!* was released to an unexpected public in 1975 by director Curt McDowell and cult film screenwriter George Kuchar. *Thundercrack!* has continued to shock and amaze audiences ever since.

Since its release it has been censored and banned in many countries and still manages to offend many who see it, according to cult film aficionados it is the most walked-out on film ever made !

Thundercrack! is unusual in that it combines a mystery/whodunit with solid acting, a very eccentric plot, unusual monologues and hard-core footage. The film has a very "pansexual" approach to sex including gay sex, blowjobs, straight sex, lesbian scenes, voyeurism, sex with a gorilla (I kid you not) and lots more. *Thundercrack!* is marked by an outrageous sense of humour and a wicked sense of play.

No pretence is made of the deliberately bad sets or the over the top acting and this just adds to the quirkiness of the film. Each of the characters has a ridiculous story which are more often than not told in melodramatic monologues which are rip-roaringly funny.

The tale begins during a terrible thunderstorm. Chandler has just picked up a hitchhiker and has settled down for some man-on-man action when he is interrupted by a strange woman knocking on his car window. Willene Cassidy explains her husband is the famous country



singer Simon Cassidy (whose music is heard at various times during the film) and asks for their help as a car has crashed and seemingly exploded down the road. Reluctantly they agree and they all travel to the first house in sight. The house is Prairie Blossom and owned by Mrs. Gert Hammond who is so drunk she cannot stand.

Willene sees that Gert is in a terrible condition and helps her to the bathroom where she puts her in a bath, soon one thing leads to another and Gert receives a welcome vaginal massage from Willene. This is the first of many strange and quirky hard-core scenes. Gert explains to Willene how difficult her life is since her husband died and since her son "no longer exists", whatever that means.

Soon Gert welcomes a range of strangers who have been stranded by the storm. Each has their own strange story to tell and their own perverse sexual habits. Chandler, as he regularly wishes to inform anyone who listens, is the widower of the wealthy Sarah Lou Phillips of The House of Phillips which is the largest girdle maker in the United States located in Waco, Texas.

His story is both ludicrous and tragic. It seems



Mad Women and Randy Gorillas



Nudity, sex and sex toys abound

the girdles made by the company are made of highly flammable rubber and at a dinner party at their estate his wife caught fire. The unthinking guests threw their drinks on her in a vain attempt to put her out but she simply burn brighter and brighter. Since Chandler sees the girdle that caused her death on ever girl he approaches he uses this as a justification for his addiction to casual gay sex.

We get told all sorts of other strange tales as the movie unfolds as well. They include the tale of Mr.Hammond who, when covered in wheat pollen, was eaten to death by locusts. We also learn he has been pickled, rather badly it seems, by his wife and his various body parts kept in the basement!

Gert Hammond is a randy old goat and she encourages the guests to change into dry clothes in the end room once used by her sex addicted son. She positions herself behind a peep hole in the kitchen and as the guests are seduced by the sex toys and gadgets on show and pleasure themselves, she watches from the kitchen masturbating with a cucumber, which she then feeds to Willene !

After dinner Gert and her guests become agitated as they hear and see strange shapes outside including one that looks like an elephant. Since the storm has left them stranded, the tension between them all explodes into clashes and fights.

The final guest to arrive at Prairie Blossom is Bing and he certainly has a tale to tell. Bing's vehicle crashed in the storm and let loose various circus animals including a female gorilla named Medusa. It seems that Medusa is a very dangerous gorilla who is sexually antagonistic to

humans.

Medusa was a great at the circus but one night Bing's mates got him drunk and told him they had a great date for him. In his drunken state he enjoyed being kissed and masturbated but in the morning he awakes to find it was Medusa the gorilla. When Medusa realizes her affection is not reciprocated, she began to hate all men. This extended to woman as well when her only real friend, an aging circus Burlesque dancer begins to mistreat her as she cannot deal with the onset of old age. While Medusa can be calmed down with bananas her real desire is Bing.

Soon there are all sorts of sexual shenanigans and bizarre plot twists. As Medusa begins to smash her way in, Bing dresses up in a wedding dress and they join together in cross species love. However, everyone is not so lucky. One of the guests, Toydy has found a key to a locked room and soon discovers Gert's unbearable shame. It seems that when her son travelled to Borneo to collect some erotic objects he returned with elephantitis and is deformed with huge sex organs, he lives hidden in a secret room suffering in pain and disgust. He grabs Roo and Toydy and now has companions of his own.

As the storm clear, Chandler and Sash leave together continuing his journey to the House of Philip in Waco. Bond and Willene also leave together though Bond makes it quite clear his wandering ways with both sexes will continue. Bing and Medusa and now married and have decided to stay with Gert. Gert now has a houseful and celebrates with a drink, sharing it with her dead husband's pickled parts.

Thundercrack! is one hell of a cult film. It combines a truly bizarre plot, some of the most hysterical dialogue you will ever hear with a dark sense of humour and hard-core sex.

This is a very underrated film, while the cult films of John Water's have been celebrated and released in special editions, *Thundercrack!* is hardly known outside obsessive cult film aficionados.

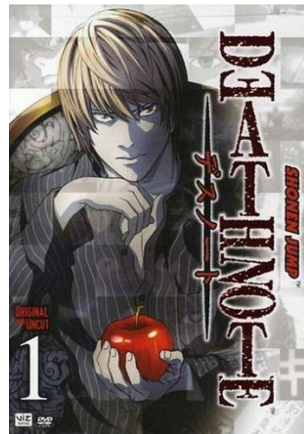
Another World Entertainment of Denmark (<http://www.anotherworldent.com/>) has a nice edition available. While there is discussion of a special restored edition (see <http://www.thundercrackthefilm.com/>) this is not available as yet.

DEATH NOTE

Death Note
VIZ Media
Madman
R4 DVD

*Japanese with English
overdub*

In 2009 we looked at the *Death Note* live film. This is the anime series on which it was based. The weekly comic magazine Shonen Jump published the series over a long period. It has translated well to the anime format.



Death Note is possibly the finest piece of anime to ever come out of Japan. It weaves a supernatural world into a modern context and examines the influence of power on a number of people. In the end the power of the Death Note will turn their lives and their morality upside down.

This is a recap of the story. A Shinigami (God of Death) named Ryuk is bored. His job is to write peoples' names in his Death Note book. They will then die and their remaining lifespan is added to his. This effectively makes him immortal. In his boredom he drops his Death Note down to the real world where it is picked up by a young idealistic law student, Light Yagami.

Ryuk has written out the details of how to use



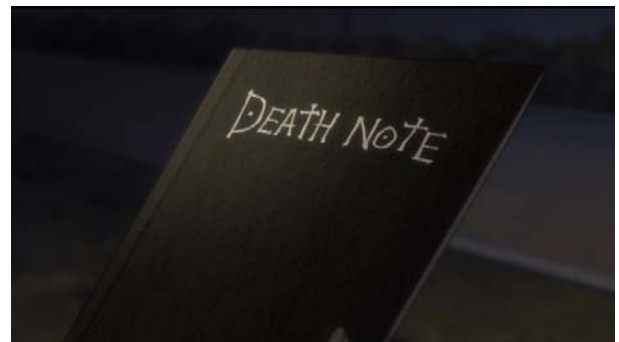
Ryuk, a Shinigami (God of Death)

the Death Note in the book, and thinking it's a joke, Light puts it to the test. The book says if he writes a name in it while picturing that person in his mind, the person will die of a heart attack in forty seconds. It works and Light sets out on a killing spree to wipe out the world's worst criminals.

So many coincidental heart attacks cannot go unnoticed and the Police are called into investigate. The man heading the investigation is Light's father. They in turn enlist the help of L, an eccentric but brilliant young private detective who prefers anonymity and a vast amount of sweet food.

Light explores the Death Note further and finds that he can describe the method and time of a victim's death. He also finds that having touched the Death Note Ryuk is now visible to him. Ryuk is not actually evil, just fascinated by the things humans do to each other. He explains other facets of the Death Note and the Shinigami to Light then sits back eating apples while Light gets himself deeper into trouble.

The word gets out and the media is full of "Kira", a Japanese pronunciation of the word "Killer". L is closing in on Kira and suspects he may have contacts in the Police force. Light falls under suspicion. He must now use the Death Note to protect himself against FBI agents who are tracking him down. The battle of wits between Kira and L deepens.



The Death Note



The story develops with other Death Notes

Light is only briefly concerned that he is turning into a serial killer, because he can justify what he is doing as cleaning up the world's criminals.

Others are affected by the Death Note's powers. Light's father, basically a policeman of high integrity, is now prepared to illegally put his family under illegal surveillance and wiretaps. L is becoming obsessive about Light being Kira – possibly because Light is his only suspect. He also is quite prepared to bend or break the law in his hunt for Kira.

It becomes more complicated when a second Kira appears. The Lord of the Shinigami has become concerned at Ryuk's interference and has sent another Shinigami, Rem, to try to bring the situation under control and if necessary to kill Ryuk. Rem gives his Death Note to a young model, Misa Amane, who is infatuated by Kira and wants to meet him.

She gets too close to Light, who is still the only suspect the Police have, and she is arrested and illegally imprisoned without trial. Light must betray Misa to protect his own existence. Surrendering her Death Note means she loses all her memory of Kira, the Death Note and Rem. She is still infatuated with Light, though. Rem, her Shinigami, does a deal with Light to kill L.

Light is also imprisoned but not before he arranges to give his Death Note back to Ryuk, to pass on to someone else. He specifies that the new owner must be an unscrupulous person in

a position of high power.

That means he loses his memory of what he was doing with it and he now becomes the idealistic student once more. The killings stop so L is vindicated, but then they start again – Light and Misa cannot be Kira – or can they? Rem is at work in the background arranging to keep his deal with Light. L is confused and invites Light to help in the investigation so he can keep an eye on Light and Misa. He still distrusts them.

Light, in his capacity as an investigator on the case, notices that the new killings are all to the advantage of an industrial combine, the Yotsuba Group. One of the eight Yotsuba executives must be Kira 3, but which one? Misa manages to find out but L still doesn't know how the deaths are caused. Rem contacts Misa and partly restores her memory – he is becoming fond of the bubbly model. The Yotsuba executive dies but who is now responsible? Is there a fourth Kira? L is piecing the puzzle together but Light, before his memory disappeared, has constructed plans within plans to protect his identity and continue Kira's work. Some of these plans involve forcing the Shinigami to help, especially Rem, whose feelings for Misa are increasingly obvious. Inevitably, L is the next victim. Light, now becoming increasingly deranged by his powers, adopts the role of L. He is now the final arbiter of justice in the world. Or so he believes.

In the United States the FBI has been unimpressed with the performance of the Japanese



Light, master of the Death Note



The Shinigami Ryuk loves Apples

police. They want the Death Note for themselves. They are being helped by a boy, Near, who has nearly the same powers of deductive reasoning as L had. He prefers to be known as "N" and he knows Light is not the real L. Near has a rival, Mello, who is working for a criminal gang. They also want the Death Note.

It seems the battle of wits is not yet over. Once again, Light's family is involved. His father or his sister may die.

The Shinigami are taking an interest too. The original notebook that Ryuk dropped was taken from another Shinigami. He now has to go to the real world, find Ryuk and recover his book.

Near is convinced Light is the new L and he is also Kira. In the Japanese Police Force suspicion is growing as well. Light is now also involving a news broadcaster, an ex girlfriend named

Kiyomi. She has become Kira's mouthpiece to the world and she has a Death Note. She is to kill Near, who is getting too close to Light, but she is abducted. Things are starting to come apart for Light. There will be a final showdown

This is a massive DVD set, covering nearly fifty episodes. Because of its sheer size it carries much more detail than the live film, although I am impressed that the live film could also include so much of the personalities and flaws of the people. Watching Light descend into righteous madness is sad but disturbing. On the one hand you agree with what he is doing, but on the other you can't agree that his mass murders are the way to do it. As he descends further his killings turn more to defending himself than wiping out evil.

The DVDs carry many extras that successfully round out the Death Note concept.

With the care and attention that went into it, it is easy to see why Death Note has become a firm favourite and a classic piece of anime.

Death Note:R Relight Visions of a Madman R4 DVD

Japanese with English subtitles.

If the size of the Death Note series puts you off, here is a practical alternative. It presents the series edited down to a single DVD. As far as I could see nothing of importance is left out.

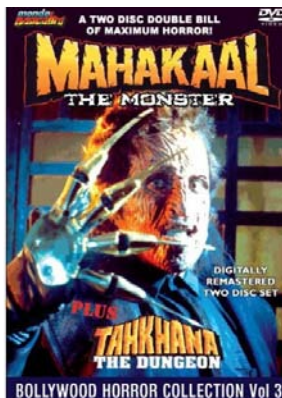


The space saving is mostly in the facets of the changing personality of Light and in some of the subplots like the penetration of the Yotsuba Group. The lesser emphasis on these has not been achieved at the expense of Light's character, though – his decline is still clearly depicted.

The editor explains in the extras that he was not prepared to sacrifice the integrity of the series to produce a quickie short version. He has done a truly marvellous job to reduce it as he has and to keep the full flavour of the characters and the plot. I suspect many viewers will buy the short version and come to look on it as a trailer for the full series.

**Bollywood Horror
Collection
Volume 3
Mondo Macabro
R1 DVD**

In the Eighties and early Nineties Bollywood cinema took a new and bizarre turn, it took impetus from Western genres such as horror and splatter and let forth a flurry of films which have to be seen to be believed.



One of the more celebrated and eccentric films in this cultural adaptation was *Mahakaal* (1993) aka *The Monster* and *Time of Death* directed by the Ramsay Brothers.. It is essentially *The Nightmare on Elm Street* re-interpreted for India with song and dance numbers and every element you would expect from a Bollywood film. It is a true marathon effort coming in at over two hours with way too many song and dance numbers, lots of sentimentality, a very camp Michael Jackson look-a-like and some quite reasonable horror.

Some of the scenes are pretty well an exact copy of the American release but are placed within the context of a longer Bollywood style film, the plot is similar but is drawn out with a lot of padding and songs which become a little tiresome after a while. That is not say it lacks entertainment value, you will scream with laughter as you see this classic horror film destroyed in the worst possible manner !

Freddy certainly doesn't look as good as in the



A scene nearly directly copied from the US film



The Indian Freddy Krueger

US film but one thing I did notice is that his glove is gold in this version ! I also like the fact that the same actor plays the roles of the campy Michael Jackson and Freddy, money saving or some strange unconscious message, who knows ?

Mondo Macabro have also included another strange film in this package; *Tahkhana: The Dungeon* (1989). This is a tale about two sisters who haven't seen each other in many years. Each sister has half of a necklace which when put combined creates a map that shows where ancient family relics have been hidden.

However, a monster, animated by the blood of a vengeful black magician, has been locked in the dungeon and is set loose when they try and retrieve their prize. A strange sub plot is about the sleazy adventurer who seems to spend the whole film trying to rape every girl he sees !

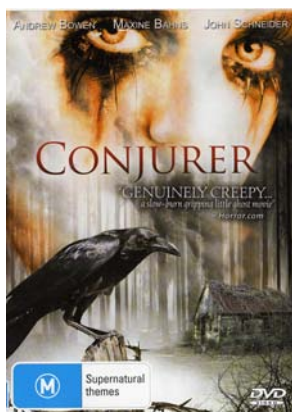
There is a solid documentary on the second DVD which covers South Asian Horror which segments on India, Pakistan and Indonesian cinema.



Escaping Freddy

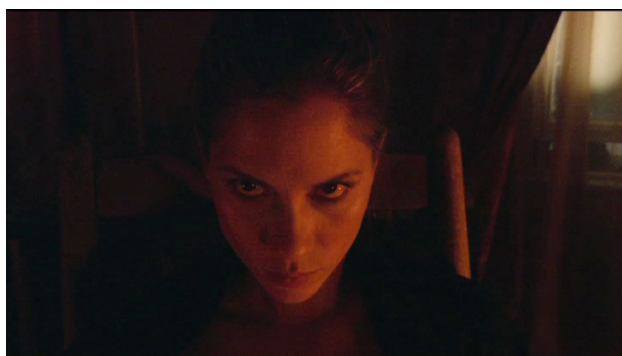
Conjurer (2009)
Red Five
Entertainment
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

Once again Peacock shows us that a budget film does not have to be a bad film. Despite a fairly conventional plot Conjurer has all the elements of a good film – acting, script and cinematography are first-class.



A young photographer, Shawn, and his wife Helen move into a house in a backwoods area. On the property is an old cabin that their neighbours are reluctant to talk about. Shawn gradually pieces together the story. Just after the American Civil War a soldier returned to his home and found the cabin built on his land without his permission. It was occupied by a girl who was a “conjurer” – partly witch, partly natural magician. Wanting her off his land, he arranged to have her baby (which he may have fathered) killed. When that didn’t move her on a group of men hung the girl. Before she died she cursed them all and said she would never leave the land until she got her baby back. Since then strange sightings and events have occurred and the property is clearly haunted.

Shawn himself starts to experience odd apparitions. Each time he investigates the cabin he seems to anger the spirit of the conjurer and she starts to turn her attention to the main house. Shawn is concerned for his wife, who he discovers is pregnant. Is the conjurer after Helen’s baby? Can Shawn keep his cool long enough to find a way to fight the conjurer off? Helen and her brother are now concerned about Shawn’s sanity. Shawn wants to move away but he is in debt to Helen’s brother for the house



Conjurer

and Helen herself has seen nothing to be afraid of.

The plot may be conventional but the acting and realistic dialogue lift it to well above average for this type of film. The cinematography skilfully highlights the contrasts between the rather beautiful wooded area and the dusty, ominous insides of the cabin. Don’t dismiss it as just another ghost story – it really is something better than most.

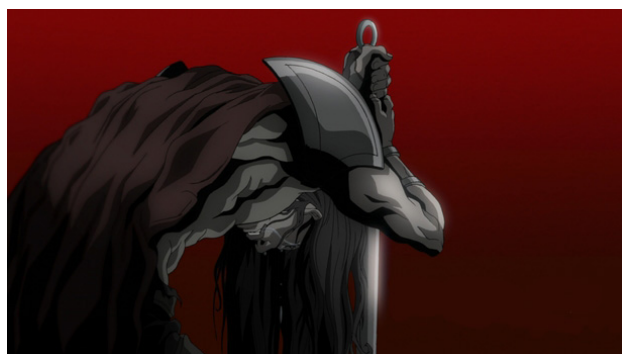
Dante’s Inferno
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD



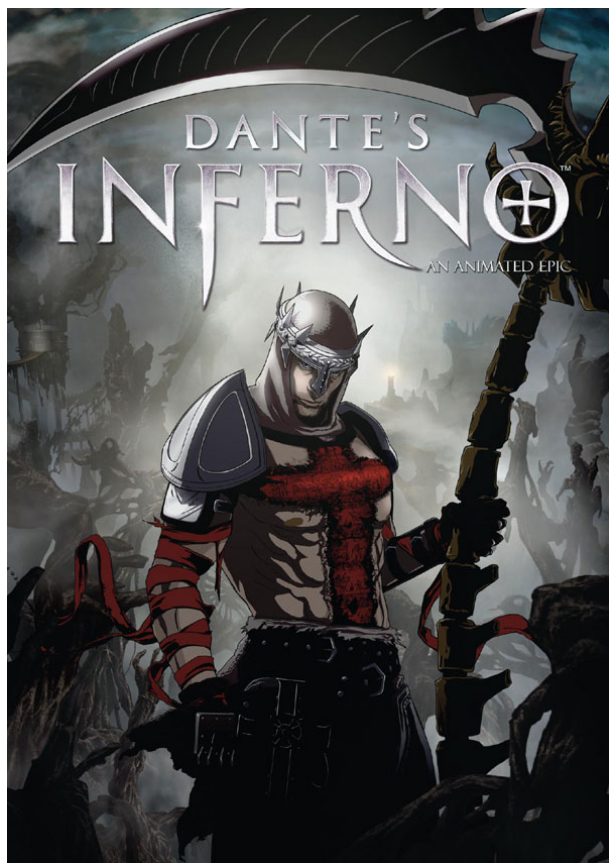
Dante’s Inferno is an unusual animated film based on a computer game. To start with I have some misgivings about Dante’s Inferno as a work of literature anyway. While significant, it is a work saturated with sin, suffering and religious dogma to such a degree that much of it is painfully repugnant. However, it is considered a classic book and should engender such degree of respect.

The interpretation offered in this animated film is strange indeed, since it is based on an interactive computer game every scene seems to be “slash and burn” with Dante tearing his way through hell with his sword. It is a bloody vision indeed filled with demons cut to pieces, torn apart and ripped asunder.

This mixture of violence and constant religious dialogues about the value of suffering, pain and sin makes a rather uncomfortable union; one that does not sit well.



Superb animation, questionable plot



The film itself is visually appealing with Virgil leading Dante on a Chivalric quest through hell to supposedly save Beatrice but in actuality to redeem himself from acts of violence he has committed while on Crusade. There are some fascinating criticisms of the Church, political institutions and the extremism of the Crusades, but generally the film follows a surprisingly conservative interpretation of the work.

The nine levels of the inferno are superbly presented. Limbo opens the film with some impressive baby demons which have been created from the souls of unbaptized children. This is also where the philosophers of non-Christian faiths reside from Plato to Buddha, so much for tolerance and respect.

The second level is Lust and includes some rather naughty randy female demons. Along the way we hear some interesting reflections from Lucifer himself. While he may have introduced sin, many spread it like a disease. Man made earth a Hell, not Lucifer.

The third level is gluttony and exists inside the gut of the gigantic Cerberus whose black heart Dante must destroy to reach the next level. Once again the film seems too much like a computer game with bosses at each level which



The geeky face of Chivalry

must be confronted and killed and tasks which must be completed.

Greed is next and then followed by Anger whose realm is within the black sludge of the river Styx. Dante then enters the City of Dis where he enters the realm of the heretics. He must fight his way through the tombs of heresy and confront the Minotaur before entering the 7th level of violence where such leaders as Alexander and Atilla reside. We also find here the wood of suicides since the Church decrees that individuals cannot even control their own time of death regardless of their suffering. The constant emphasis on suffering, sin and pain gets a bit much especially coupled with the slash and burn mentality of Dante as portrayed in the film. It might look great but this is not a nuanced or textured presentation. Fraud is the eighth level where the three great rivers of Hell meet leading to the 9th level which is the circle of Traitors. Here Dante must face Lucifer himself and through a rather pitiful display of grovelling repentance he gains entry to purgatory.

Dante's Inferno is a visual feast. Animation studios working on the film include such noted Asian animation studios as Production IG (*Kill Bill* animated sequence), Dongwoo (*Batman: Gotham Knight*), Manglobe (*Ergo Proxy*, *Samurai Champloo*), JM Animation (*Avatar: The Last Airbender*) and many others and it certainly packs a punch. Voice work is provided by Mark Hamill, Graham McTavish, Victoria Tennant, and Vanessa Branch.

When it comes to plot, character and storytelling it is a far more difficult question. The constant mixture of "Catholic guilt" with violence makes an uncomfortable mix and many will find the religious dialogue off-putting. If you view the tale as simply another piece of mythology it can be enjoyed as an interesting work of animated entertainment but with so much religious extremism in the world today that is a hard ask.

The Final Destination Roadshow R4 DVD

The Final Destination aka *Final Destination 4* is a further development of the Final Destination franchise. The Final Destination films have proven popular as they combine a number of different genre themes into a well worked plot. These include psychic phenomenon (especially premonitions and visions), death as an entity and "survivor guilt".

In each film, some form of disaster occurs and a small number of individuals survive. Since it was their "fate" to die in the disaster death hunts them down one by one, in the order they should have died, to make sure destiny has not been changed. Death never actually appears but is represented by a sequence of coincidences and an occasional gust of wind or a cold presence.

A major draw card of this series has been the use of excellent CGI to create powerful set-pieces which cumulate in the death of the individuals on "death's list". These events are seen in advance by premonitions and visions and carefully scripted to be as unusual as possible.

The film is set ten years after the explosion of Flight 180 and four years after the derailment of the Devil's Flight roller coaster. Nick is with his friends at the speedway and has a premonition of a terrifying disaster. It is clear and very specific and he finds himself very rattled.



Impressively gory death set-piece

He causes quite a scene and they run from the speedway chased by others annoyed by his intrusion into their goodtime. Soon, however, the speedway erupts into flames and they realize how lucky they have been. Things are not as they seem, however, and one by one the survivors are killed in cruel and very brutal ways.

As they work to escape death Nick becomes convinced they can cheat death by stopping one of the killings. However, when a new survivor is revealed Nick realizes they are still very much at risk, cumulating in the climatic end of the film.

Each of the death set-pieces is superbly done with macabre twists. The racist, for example, attempting to light a cross on the black guards lawn is dragged burning down the road behind his truck, an ironic turn. While the scene at the pool is just plain painful. There are rocks in the eye and a metal bar through the chest; the killings certainly come hard and fast.

The guts and gore level is certainly high and you will be in for lots of jumps and shocks.

While certainly the idea behind Final Destination is not especially new, the death set-pieces and fast action make it an enjoyable horror experience. Producer Craig Perry has stated that this is the final film in the franchise. It is also marked by an excellent rock soundtrack which was quite successful in its own right.

A 3D version was also made of the film and the 2 DVD edition includes both the 2D and 3D releases as does the Blu Ray.



The crash that sets Death's game into play

**Return to House on Haunted Hill (2007)
Unrated Edition
Warner Premiere
R1 DVD**

The House of Haunted Hill (1959) was an early horror classic. Release in the late Fifties and starring the compelling presence of Vincent Price it was the tale of five people invited by Frederick and Anabelle Loren to spend twelve hours in the house on Haunted Hill. The house is believed to be haunted and if they spent the night they will receive \$10,000, a huge amount in the dollars of the time ! Soon strange accidents occurs and one by one the guests are bumped off until the motive behind it all becomes apparent.

The 1999 remake, *House on Haunted Hill*, has a similar story starring Geoffrey Rush as the eccentric billionaire Stephen Price, who with his rather nasty wife, Evelyn, offers six strangers one million dollars each to play a dangerous game. They must spend the night in a mental asylum where a mad doctor tortured and killed his patients. In this version, the House has been replaced with a mental institution and the tale takes its inspiration from more modern gore hidden horror cinema. As the guests settle in, the asylum goes into lockdown and soon the strangers must face traps set by the Price himself and the house and its ghostly occupants take their revenge.

The sequel, *Return to House on Haunted Hill* takes things a lot further. It seems that Dr.Vannacutt, the mad psychiatrist (played superbly by Jeffrey Combs) in charge of the asylum was not solely to blame. He believed that art could influence the minds of his patients for the better and somehow came into possession



Lesbian shock treatment patients turn nasty

of Baphomet, the cult idol associated with the Knights Templar.

Slowly this embodiment of evil took over possession of the doctor and his staff leading them to all manner of surgical excesses and abuses until the patients rose up and slaughtered them all.

The sequel focuses on treasure hunters who want the idol for themselves. When the sole survivor of a massacre at the institution dies seemingly by suicide, her sister is left with a nightmare. She has been sent Dr. Vannacutt's diaries which contain a map to where the idol is hidden and there are two groups hot on its trail. One of which is led by a violent thug who with his team of mercenaries is ready to do anything to get hold of the idol which he can on sell for a cool \$5,000,000 and he knows who has the diary.

As they explore the asylum ghosts abound, thugs are torn apart and a hot lesbian living dead scene unfolds. There are professional rivalries, shocks and jumps and lots of supernatural action. It would be reasonable to say this is not the most intelligent plot; it is fairly straight forward shock-horror with a passing level of character development.

The ghosts and supernatural elements work well, but the film moves into overdrive when it comes to the second half with the search for the statue. The industrial crematorium under the house is very creepy and the decaying bodies, mad patients and surgical scenes all add to the unsettling atmosphere.

The combination of the Baphomet backstory, treasure hunting and the ghostly supernatural tale makes this an enjoyable and entertaining sequel. While it is predictable and ultimately does not bring enough new to the table to make it truly memorable, it is a fun watch on a dark and windy night.



Dead Nurses get their revenge

Sorority Row
Sony
R4 DVD

This is a creative and even at times camp slasher taking inspiration from Mark Rosman's *The House on Sorority Row*. It also nods to a range of horror classics from *I know What You Did Last Summer* to *Scream*.



Theta Pi is a sorority from hell, the girls are obnoxious, manipulative and dangerous. A group of them decide to play a practical joke on one of their cheating boyfriends (who is also one of their brothers). They give him some drugs and suggest he makes out with his ex-girlfriend Megan as a way of saying sorry. They have a live feed in his room linked to youtube. As things get hot and sweating, she starts to foam at the mouth and she passes out. They all play along driving to a hospital but claim she has died along the way. They travel to an abandoned spot where they claim they need to depose of the body. Of course this is all a bad joke, but things go horribly wrong. When they debate how to get the air out of her chest to bury her, the panicked youngster Justin rams a car jack into her chest. Now she is really dead and they are all murderers.

The remaining sorority sisters, the dominant Jessica (Leah Pipes), sex and pills Chugs (Margo Harshman), Asian sexpot Claire (Jamie Chung) and nerdy Ellie (Rumer Willis) decide to hide the body and keep it a secret. There is lots of protesting and debate but the body is finally

thrown down a mineshaft and Megan is reported as missing.

Four years later and they have just graduated. A text arrives on all on their phones showing the murder weapon. They realize they are all in trouble but who is after them. Justin has become mentally unstable; is he the source of the problem? What about Megan's sister who has just pledged the sorority? Or could Megan be back from the dead.

Sorority Row is an excellent mixture of guts, gore and humour. It is a true homage to Eighties slasher films and filled with sex, nudity and teen misbehaviour. The kills are high in number but do not follow the modern trend into torture porn but have an element of humour. Even the murder weapon is a pimped out car jack with all sorts of accessories.

The characters are all unlikable and the dialogue suitably bitchy, even the secondary characters have great dialogue. One of the stand-out figures is Carrie Fisher as the sorority mum, she is one tough mamma.

There are lots of diversions in the plot so it really is hard to guess who the killer is until the very end.

Sadly *Sorority Row* didn't get especially good press on release which I think is a shame. It seems today horror must be either super violent torture porn or straight comedy and a quirky mix such as this one is not really appreciated for what it is. Anyone who enjoyed Eighties slasher films should enjoy *Sorority Row*.

There are some nice extras including a documentary on the making of *Sorority Row* and a kill switch which takes you to each killing !



Down the mineshaft with Megan



One down, another one on the way

Temptation
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
 Bob Estreich

Yes, it's another vampire film, but this one is pretty good. It's an independent production but seems to have none of the shortcomings that are usually found in the genre. The acting is good, the plot is intelligent and the cinematography is dark and in keeping with the film.

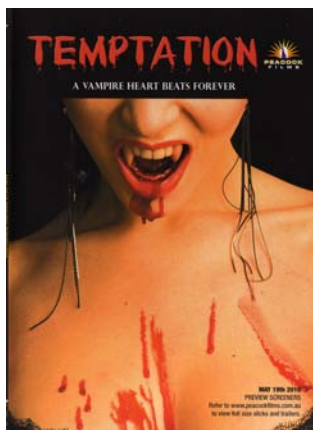
Isabel is having a night out with the girls in London. She gets into an illegal minicab for the ride home but the driver takes her to a quiet alley and rapes her. The rape is seen by Aurelie, head of a secret group of female vampires. She kills the rapist then bites the almost-unconscious Isabel.

The next morning Isabel's life is in turmoil. She finds she is now allergic to sunlight. She can't remember exactly what happened to her but she is having flashes of the rape. She is sick as the vampire blood starts to take her over.

Worst of all the Police are looking for her in connection with the dead cabbie – her mobile phone was found in the back of his car.

She tracks down the vampire group at a lesbian nightclub being run in an abandoned warehouse. Aurelie reveals that she saved Isabel because Isabel looks just like her girlfriend from hundreds of years ago.

Isabel will continue changing into a vampire, but first she must take blood from a victim. The only other option is that she dies before the change is complete. She has 48 hours to decide.



Girls in action

To put pressure on her, Aurelie kills Isabel's mother and sister. The vampire group discover Isabel's boyfriend at the nightclub where he has followed her. They attack him and feed on him. His death is bloody and brutal. The Police now have a warrant for Isabel's arrest and she must decide what her future will be. If there is one.

Full marks go to the actresses, some of whom are relatively inexperienced. Caroline Haines puts in a particularly good performance as Isabel.

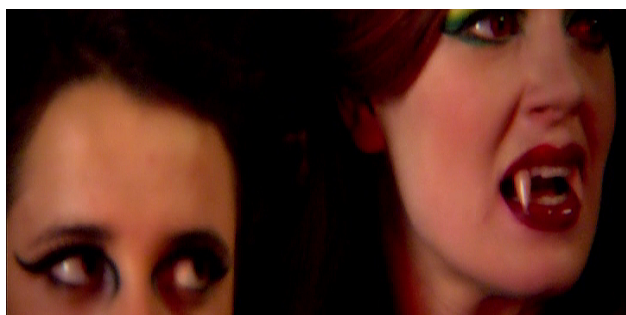
The vampire genre is rather tired at the moment and has been largely abandoned by filmmakers. This film could revive it once more.

The Landlord (2009)
Massive Ego
Productions
R1 DVD
Blu Ray

Reviewer:
 Bob Estreich

Tyler is a young man with a problem. He manages the rental apartments in an old house owned by his money-hungry sister, but they don't make much money because a pair of demons, Rashtu and Lamashtu, have set themselves up in the building and keep eating the tenants of the top floor apartment.

The record so far is two tenants within four hours of their moving in, which makes it hard for Tyler to collect much rent. The demons leave him alive because he is something of a pet to them.



Sexy Vampires



Beef Jerky Making

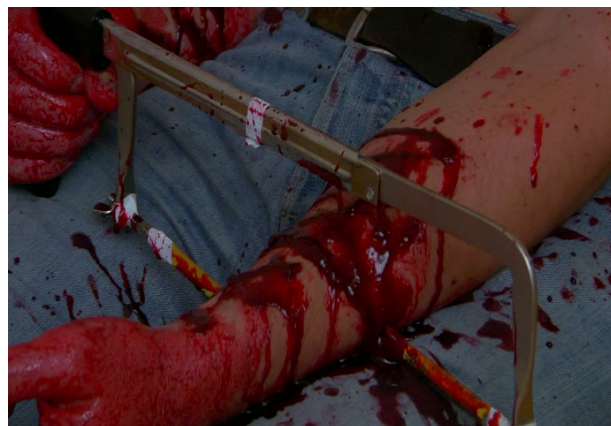
His credit card also comes in useful for ordering tacky dragon statues and beef jerky makers.

There are plenty of new tenants available but the local police detectives suspect Tyler has something to do with the constant disappearances in the area. His sister, a policewoman, knows about the demons and also has some sort of deal with a local gang of zombies and vampires in her role as a Satanist.

She is, however, no help to Tyler with the detectives. It is a constant battle to dispose of clothing, bones and other evidence that the police would use.

Fortunately Rashtu likes TV police shows and understands the importance of DNA in evidence. He shows Tyler how to consign the rubbish and body parts to Hell and so far there have been no complaints from Down There. It seems no one can help Tyler out of his troubles.

His newest tenant is a girl on the run from a brutal husband and looking for an abortion and a divorce. She and Tyler become friends and for the first time in his otherwise lonely life Tyler



Loads of gore

comes to care for someone.

Then the demons discover she is pregnant. They find babies particularly tasty so they decide to look after her until the baby arrives. Her ex-husband arrives first. How can Tyler protect her, placate the demons, and save his own skin as well?

For an independent production the film is a great piece of work. There are particularly fine performances by Derek Dziak (Tyler), Rom Barhordar (Rabisu) and Michelle Corvais (his new girlfriend). The film abounds in little comedy touches like Rabisu's dreadful taste in floral shirts. Writer / Director Emil Hyde has kept the CGI to a minimum so it doesn't detract from the overall humour of the film.

Frankly it is all done so well that it has none of the low-budget indie look. It has the traditional horror look but the dark humour gives it that something extra that lifts it out of the ordinary.

Extras include the usual making of doco, deleted scenes and other tasty bits.



The fashion challenged dead



Hungry Demons everywhere

Black Magic **Shaw Brothers (1975)** **Various Editions**

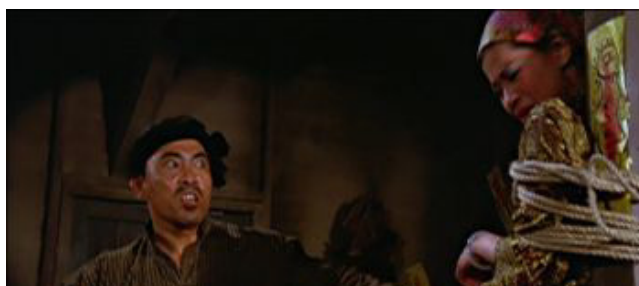
Shaw Brothers could be described as the Hammer Studios of the East, it was a vast movie mill producing films in an incredible array of genres over the longest period of time. These films included everything from martial arts to action, popular entertainment to what could be defined as cult films. It was the foremost and largest Hong Kong movie production company producing around 1,000 films. They tried hard to keep up with the times and in response to the cult and horror film explosion in the West during the Seventies produced a range of unusual over-the-top titles. *Black Magic* (1975) and its sequel *Black Magic II* (1977) are the best examples.



Black Magic is filled with gratuitous nudity, gore and perverse twists. Shan Jianmi, the evil sorcerer, seems to have a fetish for breast milk and even makes a love spell by putting rice into a woman's vagina. There is lots of blood, some severed heads, a detached penis under the bed (which strangely is described as a "finger" in the subtitles) and disintegrating baddies.

While the content is suitably extreme it is presented in a carefully edited manner and would not cause much offense today.

An intriguing aspect of the plot is that while it includes all manner of bizarre content it actually reinforces traditional values. Construction engineer Xu Nuo is seen in a positive light as he is a hard worker while Luo Yin is shown negatively since she received her money as an inheritance. Nuo's wife is shown positively since she is a nice stay at home girl while Luo Yin is an evil sleep-a-round hussy. Anyone who uses a spell (even a love spell) dies, including gold digger Liang Jiajie and in the battle between good and evil it is obvious which will win. All of these themes emphasize the conflict between



Evil Sorcerer in action



A strange place to keep rice warm !

"traditional" Asian values (family, good family, hard-work, the woman as wife etc) and modernist values (drinking alcohol, affairs, money received without hard work, indulgent independent women). This conflict is at the heart of much Asian cinema and it is fascinating to see it encoded in what is essentially an exploitation style horror film.

While these traditional plot elements make *Black Magic* seem a little quaint today, it is still a fun film with lots of unusual elements and a very groovy lounge score !

Black magician Shan Jianmi makes his living selling love spells, curses and death spells. His speciality is death curses and after he kills one couple too many in his local village, a magical battle erupts with the local "good" sorcerer Furong which burns down his home (killing the girl who requested the spell, of course) and driving Shan Jianmi from the village.

We now cut to sometime in the future in an unnamed urban location. Xu Nuo a successful and very good looking construction engineer is planning his wedding. He is the target of an obsessive rich widow Luo Yin who won't take no for an answer. At the same time Liang Jiajie desires Luo Yin both for her looks and money and when she rejects him he arranges for Shan Jianmi to cast a love spell. Jianmi is not a stupid sorcerer and only creates a spell that lasts one night and when Liang doesn't pay things get nasty. In an attempt to save his hide Liang introduces the black magician to Luo Yin who pays him to gain control over Xu Nuo. When Nuo's family interferes she plans to have them killed by death spells. However as Nuo's wife becomes ill Furong steps in to save Nuo and realizes that the evil career of Shan Jianmi must be ended forever.

A wild magical battle ensues in which special effects abound, evil is defeated and the married couple are re-united once again.

**Haeundae
Madman
R4 DVD**

Haeundae is a Korean Tsunami disaster film which is big in terms of plot, character development and special effects. It is unusual to find a film which while embracing big budget special effects and a powerful catastrophe theme is also able to explore family, community and personal relations.

While more modern Hollywood disaster films tend to have a short preparation with basic character development, then a special effects extravaganza followed by a "survival tale", *Haeundae* harks back to earlier disaster titles such as the Poseidon adventure where the story and plot are as significant as the special effects and climatic disaster scenes.

The majority of the film focuses on a web of interpersonal relations which take place in Busan, Korea's second biggest city. Through these relationships Yoon Je-kyun is able to explore a range of issues important to Korean society, ranging from relationships to family, crime to urbanization and development. It is surprising just how complex the film becomes and the stories it is able to tell before a single wave has hit. Each of these characters later play roles of varying significance as the mega-Tsunami hits.

There is the good hearted but chaotic Man-sik and girlfriend Ms Kang; his geeky coast-guard brother and a hot girl he rescues who somehow falls for him. More significantly there is a trou-



Action balanced with good storytelling

bled divorced couple which is made up of the ocean geologist who uncovers evidence that a mega-Tsunami is on the way and his ambitious social climber ex-wife. There is Man-Sik's Uncle who is a property developer and his mother, a sharp and touch Matriarch. The community is fleshed out with a wide range of other related characters and stories.

What is impressive is the way in which the story is deliberately carefully paced. The complex web of relations is developed and developed some more with little real "action" except for fights and clashes and a backstory involving Man-Sik and the death of Kang's father. That is not to say it doesn't keep your interest, but just you are waiting for disaster to hit !

Through the work of the geologist we learn about recent underwater earthquakes as well as various natural portents such as seagulls losing their bearings, but nothing major until the Tsunami hits.

When it hits, sure does it hit. The CGI is pretty incredible and the disaster scenes have a high



Amazing Special Effects in Haeundae



Very realistic CGI



Excellent character development with complex personalities you relate to and care about

level of authenticity but the director also deliberately uses unusual camera angles, stunts and quirky performances to give the disaster a very different feel. The special effects are well done but again unusual. At times they have been deliberately used in a “fantastic” manner which adds an element of fantasy to the authenticity of the disaster. This strange mix is compelling and stimulating.

While the Tsunami is depicted in all its brutal majesty, there are deliberate humorous elements used to emphasize the shock of the event. The scenes on the bridge as trucks explode as a cigarette light triggers disaster is visually stunning and funny in a very dark sort of way.

Haeundae is unusual in that it doesn't stay within one “emotional” key; generally Hollywood films try to limit the emotional extremes of what they present, but not in *Haeundae*.

It moves quickly from humour to horror, death and destruction to laughter and even love, there is a fluidity in the plot which is truly impressive. I would suggest that this comes from a different cultural standpoint. Hollywood still tends to think in polarized, even absolutist terms; good and evil and right and wrong are still the categories of choice. Korea having a strong Buddhist tradition tends to be more relativist and hence characters are shown as more human, flawed yes, but not simply “good and evil” and accordingly a wider range of emotion and human behaviour can be explored on-screen.

Haeundae is a good example of this where the life of an extended community is presented, warts and all, and the whole spectrum of human emotion is given expression. This also leads to a



A powerful portrayal of personal loss

very different approach to two important elements within any disaster film, the portrayal of the heroic and the nature of the environment.

In *Haeundae* the hero is not some brazen individualist but is the community as a whole. While Man-Sik's coast guard brother sacrifices himself, he is not celebrated as a lone-gun but as part of a community who worked together to help each other. This is a very different portrayal of heroism which is far more community focused and removes the brash egoism of so many disaster films. There is also a change in the way the environment is depicted.

While certainly it is destructive, it is not “the enemy”, we do not send rockets, bombs or whatever else to try and divert the disaster, we accept the variability of the cycles of weather and adapt. We may use early warning systems or evacuations plans but we accept that nature has her cycles and work with them. These two elements are intriguing as they make *Haeundae* a very different sort of disaster film with a very unusual sensibility.

In *Haeundae* lots of people die including the ones you identify with. There is a level of honesty about the nature of a disaster which is refreshing compared to feel good we-all-make-it-in-the-end type cinema.

There are scenes which are moving, others which are very confronting, others which are humorous, while the sheer intensity of some of the Tsunami scenes are quite compelling. All in All, this is a very new take on an old genre and offers a powerful cinematic experience which most will find riveting and enthralling.

**My Fuhrer (2010)
First Run Features
R1 DVD**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

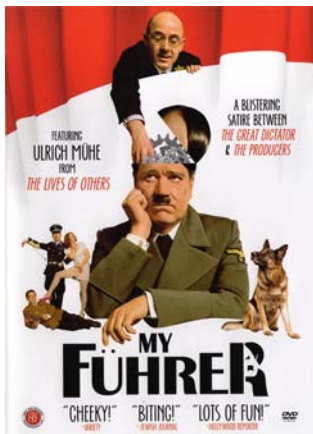
German with clear
subtitles

For some years now there has been a developing attitude that only the official story of the terrors of the Holocaust should be considered and any other viewpoint is racist, discriminatory or otherwise antisocial.

It is certainly not something that could be part of a comedy. Well, here is that comedy. It is dark humour but it is also biting satire, totally irreverent to the Nazi leadership, and doesn't show much respect for the Jews either.

It is December 1944. Germany is obviously losing the war. Much of central Berlin is in ruins, but Hitler has become a recluse inside the Reichs Chancellery and isn't aware of just how bad the situation is. Without his strong leadership to rally the people, German society and resistance is crumbling. Goebbels has a great idea.

All the country needs is a great rallying speech from their Fuhrer to pull them together, just as his speeches did at the start of the war. There is a problem with this idea, though. Hitler is an ageing, beaten man. He is overweight and in poor health and lacks the spirit and drive for



**Superbly made black comedy which is
visually arresting**

such a speech.

At the start of the war Hitler was trained in public speaking, breathing and oratory techniques by one of Germany's finest actors and drama coaches, Professor Adolf Grunbaum. Goebbels will get Grunbaum to coach Hitler again. Grunbaum unfortunately is a Jew and is in Sachsenhausen concentration camp being worked to death.

In a sly dig at German bureaucracy a rush sequence shows orders being issued, many forms being stamped, staff being assigned to guard Grunbaum on his trip, and his final rapid appearance in Berlin. If you want to amuse yourself while watching the film, try to count the "Heil Hitlers". Hitler saying "Heil Me" doesn't count.

Goebbels explains to Grunbaum what is required of him and Grunbaum meets Hitler for the first time in many years. He is shocked at what Hitler has become and sets about building



The Fuhrer





Some truly strange moments in My Fuhrer

him back up with exercise and speech coaching. The incongruity of this situation escapes both men. Goebbels and the Nazi leaders are spying on their every move through a one-way mirror into Hitler's apartment.

Grunbaum plays with Hitler's emotions to teach him once again how to put power into his speeches and gradually Hitler becomes the leader of old. We find he is also frightened of what he has done to Germany. Grunbaum asks Hitler to imagine himself and his emotions during the best and worst moments of his life and we find Hitler was molested by his father, who was secretly part-Jewish, as a boy.

Are we supposed to feel sympathy for him? Grunbaum does, and even manages to fight off the urge to kill Hitler after he accidentally knocks him out.

The watching Nazis decide that Germany's only hope of salvation is to get rid of Hitler but first they will let him make the speech. The situation is becoming increasingly unreal.

In one of the film's strangest scenes Hitler is wandering through the Chancellery one night alone. He sees the damage done to his Berlin and realises his staff have been lying to him. He reverts to being a lonely, frightened child and finishes up at Grunbaum's apartment where his family has been released from the camp and jammed into a single room as part of Grunbaum's reward for his work. Distraught, Hitler seeks a friendly face and Grunbaum's wife comforts him and puts him to sleep just like a little child in their own bed.



Of course Goebbels has no intention of allowing Grunbaum to live after the speech is made. The top Nazis plot to blow up Hitler during the speech and make him a martyr. The Jew Grunbaum will be the scapegoat. At this point Hitler seems more sane than the other Nazi leaders.

Since most of Berlin has been destroyed in the bombing Goebbels has had a huge film set made up of Berlin as it was. A million people have been brought in to line the studio streets and cheer their beloved leader while he makes the speech. The plot is turning into fantasy. Grunbaum is positioned under the dais where Hitler will speak. He has been told that Hitler wants him on hand to witness the speech. At the critical moment Hitler loses his voice and Grunbaum himself must make the speech from the hidden position.

Can he survive the plot? With film cameras rolling, will he stick to the script or will he finally come to his senses and state the case for the Jews in the camps? Will the Nazis succeed in blowing up their leader? At the end of it all, who lives and who dies?

The film is listed as "The Absolutely Truest Truth About Adolf Hitler". It isn't but it is very very funny in its own way. It owes nothing to Mel Brooks' *Springtime For Hitler*.

It is one of the darkest comedies I have seen and considering the subject matter I am surprised that writer / director Danny Levy got away with it. It verges on tasteless but only if you are going to be precious about the Holocaust. Otherwise it's a brilliant satire about a desperate time.

Ong Bak 2: The Beginning Madman / Eastern Eye R4 DVD

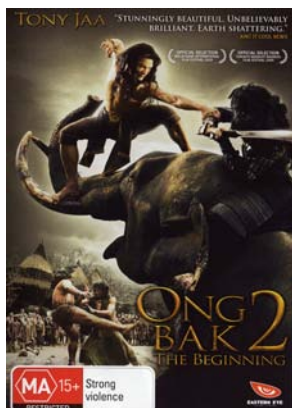
Thai with clear English subtitles

Strictly speaking this film has nothing to do with the original Ong Bak, but is a separate story set hundreds of years earlier in 1421.

Thailand was at this time in a feudal state, with civil war going on between powerful warlords. The Ayutthaya dynasty is gradually winning power over the rival Sukhothai dynasty. Lord Sihadecho rules one of the new Ayutthaya provinces but is being plotted against by the treacherous Lord Rajasena, head of the army. He sends assassins to murder Sihadecho's family. The only survivor is Tien, their ten year old son.

Tien is captured by slavers and taken to a local slave market. He fights his captors uncontrollably, so the leader of the slavers orders him thrown into a water-filled pit with a crocodile. He is saved when Cher Nung, the leader of a major "bandit" group of guerrillas, throws him a knife and tells him "your life depends on you, young boy". Tien kills the crocodile and is adopted by Cher Nung.

In Cher Nung's village Tien is trained in all the styles of martial arts that the motley band is skilled in. With his lust for vengeance driving him on, Tien excels in each form and is about to be announced as the next bandit King by Cher Nung, who is getting on in years. Before this, he



The Crocodile Pit

must settle some accounts and get the vengeance out of his system.

The slave trader is the first. Tien single-handedly takes on the trader's men in a long battle that shows his mastery of the many martial arts. The slave trader himself gets to join the crocodile.

The next target is Rajasena, the head of the army and now the ruler of the province. In another vicious battle at Rajasena's palace Tien apparently kills Rajasena. His vengeance now complete, he returns to the bandit village. The village seems strangely deserted. Then Tien is attacked by armoured soldiers. They are the villagers, Tien's friends. Rajasena has survived due to the armour he was wearing. His soldiers have surrounded the village and the old bandit Cher Nung, who was secretly in league with Rajasena, must kill Tien or his own family will be killed.

The film closes with Tien lying on the ground surrounded by a closing group of Rajasena's soldiers. This cliffhanger conveniently leaves the way open for a sequel.

The film is a classic revenge story, the Thai equivalent of a good Western. It is done with an enthusiasm that I have noted in previous south-east Asian films – the fight scenes are extended, the action is savage, the martial arts are full of movement rather than the stylised posturing of the Japanese equivalent. There is little or no character development although Tien (Tony Jaa) manages to do a good job depicting hatred with his facial expressions. Sorapong Chatree is brilliant as the old rogue Cher Nung.

It is hard to fault the film. Especially if you are a martial arts fan, watch this one.



Bandit King

**Onimasa
A Japanese
Godfather (2010)
AnimEigo
R1 DVD**

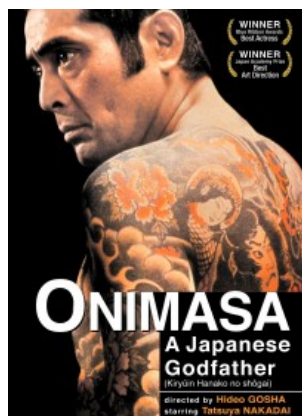
Japanese with clear subtitles

This unusual and fascinating drama is not about criminal gangs as such, but rather their place in Japanese society in the period between World Wars I and II. Onimasa is the head of a small criminal gang on Shikoku island. He is basically a small-time Yakuza warlord, but as well as parasiting off the local people he also dispenses a sort of rough justice, keeps the peace and keeps his area running smoothly.

The local people, while perhaps resenting his wealth and power in the face of their poverty, will bring him their problems. Onimasa in turn answers to a higher-up in the Yakuza, "Sir" Sudo. Onimasa sees himself as a sort of samurai in the age of chivalry, in spite of the reality.

Onimasa has married Sir Sudo's daughter to gain power and prestige in the criminal hierarchy. They are childless and his wife is degenerating into drunkenness as he adopts local girls into the clan as his "daughters". One such young girl, Matsue, comes from a large but poor family. She continues her schooling as Onimasa's daughter and soon becomes a favorite in the household. Her ability to read and write is useful to the largely illiterate clan members and her pleasant personality as a young girl means she is popular with the other daughters and the "soldiers", the fighting men who keep order and carry out the criminal work.

The times are changing in Japan. Labour unions are being formed, and one union calls a strike of the railway workers in the area. Sudo is concerned that a war may be coming and he is trying to become a "legitimate" businessman who will profit from a war. He is a shareholder in the railway and he instructs Onimasa to deal with the union organizers and finish the strike. Onimasa meets his match in a young labour organizer, Tanabe, who calls him Sudo's "pet dog" and reminds him of the honour and responsibility that he once felt. Chastened, Onimasa backs off the union and Sudo now has to remind him of his duty to the Yakuza. Bravely Onimasa de-



fies Sudo, but he now has a powerful enemy.

Sudo breaks the strike by violence and by having Tanabe imprisoned. Onimasa sends Matsue to give him some gifts in prison and show his respect to the young man. On his release, Onimasa invites him to his home. He intends to give Tanabe one of his "daughters" in marriage. Instead of the girl he had in mind the young man picks Matsue.

Onimasa is enraged – he has fallen in love with Matsue himself and accuses Tanabe of having had an affair with Matsue. To prove his innocence "with his body", Tanabe severs a finger. His innocence proven, he walks out and Onimasa has another enemy. Onimasa then confesses his love to Matsue and rapes her.

From here his clan falls further. Although he tries to create allegiances with other gangs, many are now openly hostile to him. His men are being killed in fight after fight with a rival gang. In the final blow his wife, whom he still loves, dies from a typhus outbreak. There is only one thing for a man of honour to do. He confronts the rival gang leader in a showdown reminiscent of a Western shootout, even down to the music.

The film is a fascinating look at the power structure of the time. It appears Japan was barely out of feudalism, indeed possibly still in it, with the gangster leaders replacing the old warlords. The feelings of honour and the code of the samurai warrior are obsolete to the modern criminal classes – profit and power is all, but they will still call on loyalty and tradition if it is needed to further their purposes. The labour organizers are not making much headway. The big bosses are in collusion with the police and the police can be used to suppress any dissent.

Matsue represents one of the few changes taking place. Her education gives her options not available to most others, whose options are either geisha or farmhand. In this she contrasts with Onimasa. His world is failing, hers is the future. It is a story full of tragedy. Director Hideo Gosha has extracted brilliant performances from his actors and actresses, which can't have been easy considering the size of the cast and the range of personalities. The film deserves every one of its nominations in the Japan Academy Prize.

**Three Kingdoms:
Resurrection of the
Dragon (2008)**
Peoples Republic of
China
Icon Home
Entertainment
DVD and Blu-Ray

Cantonese with clear
English subtitles

This is the follow-up to Battle For Red Cliff. The southern Kingdoms of China have now united as the Kingdom of Shu and face the old enemy Cao who controls the Kingdom of Wei. Cao was previously defeated at the battle of Red Cliff and as he ages he starts to train his daughter Cao Yang in strategy, battle and fighting skills. She will be the one to try to unify China as Cao wished.

In the Kingdom of Shu a young soldier, Zhao Zilong, has enlisted. He meets Pingan, a man from his home town, and the two become friends. As they survive battle after battle Zilong's skills are noticed by his commanders and he rises through the ranks. As the older Generals die or are killed in battle it becomes Zilong's mission to extend Shu rule into Cao's kingdom.

Thirty odd years later Zilong is starting to show his age. He is unbeaten in battle but the sons of the other generals are now looking for their own share of glory. A huge combined force is sent north to finally take Cao's lands. Cao Yang is now in control of their forces and she is a brilliant tactician. Zhuge, Liu's strategic adviser from the Red Cliff days, may have met his match.

He devises a plan that will see the young generals take Cao's provinces quickly with the majori-



Superb cinematography

ty of the army. Zilong will fight his final battle before retirement as a diversionary attack. This should draw Cao Yang's forces away from her provinces. It is a suicide mission and depends on the provinces being taken quickly so the army can be moved rapidly to support Zilong. Cao Yang has a spy in Zilong's troops and is aware of this so she orders her provincial commanders to fight only defensive actions to tie up the invaders as long as possible while the mass of her army deals with Zilong.

Zilong is outnumbered but his loyal troops stay with him and fight terrible battles with huge losses. The battle finally comes down to a personal duel between Zilong and Cao Yang. Can there be a victor?

Strangely, after John Woo's brilliant direction of The Battle For Red Cliff, this film was given to Daniel Lee Yan Kong. While his work is as good as Woo's, with the huge battle scenes and magnificent scenery, the film seems to be lacking something. It seems to be the old problem with sequels – you've seen most of it before. It's still a great epic, though, and well worth watching.



Epic Film from China



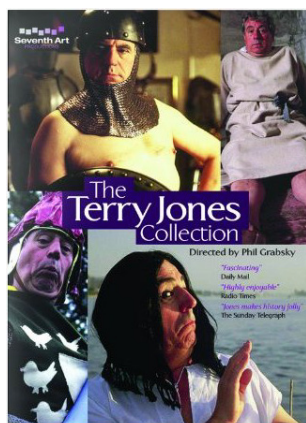
Packed with action



Serious Talk about Sex !

Romance, love and sex is central to human experience and has been the focus of cinema from the very earliest days. Nearly every film has some level of eroticism, from the simple kiss or romantic love plot to visions of passionate bliss and onwards to the wild expanses of fetish and beyond. Even if we discuss "mainstream" rather than purely adult cinema the sex is always there, it is unusual to find any film that does not include some level of erotic or romantic content. A sometimes overlooked area has been the long tradition of documentary making in the field. So let's look at an interesting selection of documentaries on love, lust, sex and censorship.

For openers I would recommend a fascinating journey into the customs of sex as presented by that eccentric "Monty Python" Terry Jones. It is available within the *Terry Jones Collection* from Seventh Arts (UK), distributed by Microcinema in the US. The set includes 2 DVDs and there are two documentaries on Love, Sex and social customs.



Ancient Inventions: Love Sex (Episode two) pre-empt some of the material covered in the individual program found on disc two. Jones has a particular beef with moral puritans and sexual suppression and so when dealing with sex he is especially amusing. He uncovers all sorts of interesting inventions which were made due to pressure of love (and lust). The first clock, for example, was developed by a Buddhist monk in China to assist the emperor in regulating his sexual activities to the sacred astrological timetable which was the foundation of his lineage. Then there are the first herbal forms of birth control, day after pills, abortion potions and even pregnancy tests !

The Surprising History of Sex and Love on the second DVD is a real gem. In many ways here Jones shows his hand more than in any of the other docos. He offers a clear and honest history of views of sexuality, from the sex positive views of ancient pagan cultures to the sexual suppression forged by militarism and Christianity. Along the way we are treated to everything from a history of syphilis to the laws regulating prostitution. Some of the most amusing aspects of the program come from the strange trivia Jones presents about cultural attitudes to sex and morality. It is a surprising adult program yet presented in such a way that it is not only informative but amusing. Jones has the ability to discuss the most sensitive of subjects in a subtle way which is both inoffensive and at the same time damn funny.

Why Be Good ?

(Image Entertainment R1 DVD 2008) is one of the more thorough documentaries on the early days of pre-censorship Hollywood. It examines all aspects of erotica, sexuality and the surprisingly daring nature of early cinema which was sadly suppressed by enforcement of the Hays code and the birth of censorship. There are lots of very rare film clips and photos of the great beauties of the age, male and female, including Mae West, Clara Bow, Jean Harlow, Louise Brooks, Marlene Dietrich and of course Valentino. This is a very informed documentary offering significant insight into the changing views of sex and cinema and the way in which a moral minority was able to gain control over what individuals were allowed to watch (and still continues to do so).



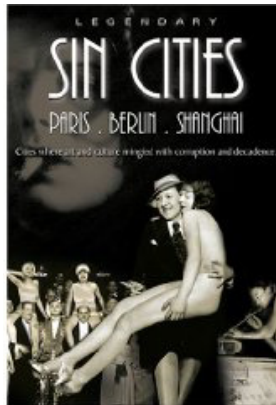
Lovers of mainstream cinema tend to assume that we have always had the same puritan

codes in place we have today and this is encouraged by the propaganda spouted by the conservative lobby. However this 1950's approach to the world is not backed up by history. There have been around the world times and places where social norms were different from today and these are not just in the long distant past.

One of the more fascinating series in this regards is *Legendary Sin Cities* (CBC TV R1 DVD), which was produced by Canadian Television company CBC. It covers Berlin, Paris and Shanghai and has received exceptional press. After the blood-bath of World War I drastic changes took place around the world, however, in certain unique locations, these changes included an immense sense of freedom and liberation. In three particular cities these conditions gave rise to a truly libertine spirit where sexuality of all forms was openly expressed and the media was given free reign. In each of these cities freedom was a "two edged sword" matched with crime, poverty and deprivation and this darker side cannot be forgotten. However, the free spirit of each city also gave birth to unique expressions in art and culture.

In Berlin, this occurred during the twenties and gave rise to one of the most openly gay cultures known before the Stonewall riots. However, it would be wrong to reduce what occurred to sex-

The Eldorado was a gay club in Berlin in the 1920's. When the Nazis took power it was closed and turned into a Nazi party office



uality alone. Berlin attracted all manner of literary figures, musicians and artists from around the world and produced many individuals of world renown including Marlene Dietrich. It is amazing to think that Berlin also had its own Institute of Sexology, headed by Marcus Hirschfeld which fought for gender and sexual rights (including Gay rights) in the 1920's, one can only imagine what could have been achieved if this movement had not been cut short by the Nazis.

Paris in the 1920's is explored in the next episode and examines all manner of entertainment including the wide and diverse sexual environment. During the 1920's Paris had no less than 220 registered brothels that catered for all tastes. One of the unique aspects of Paris was the fact that it was so enamoured of Jazz that it welcomed with open arms African Americans at a time when their homeland was still gripped with racism. Jazz was all the rage and Josephine Baker became the celebrity of the period. The death of the Parisian experience was caused by the influx of way too many American tourists and then finally the money dried up in the Wall Street Crash. The vast majority of artists, living on incomes from home, could no longer afford to stay and the "Crazy Years" of Paris came to an end.

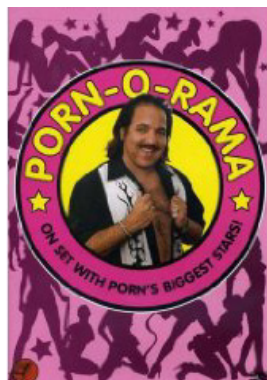
Shanghai during the 1930's was a strange and bizarre experience. It was packed with night-clubs which never closed and hotels which supplied opium with your room service. It was a city where no passport was required so any number of escaping gangsters arrived each day mixed with refugees of all sorts. When some 20,000 white Russians fleeing the Soviet revolution flooded into Shanghai and could not find work, their wives and daughters took up prostitution and brothels multiplied overnight. The heated mix of crime, sex and drugs created a unique climate, where many of the crime lords were also the local police.

This series is marked by a mixture of superb interviews, rare original footage, photographs and re-enactments. Each section also focuses in on specific individuals from the period and hence offers a "personal" view of the revolution that was taking place. The filmmakers undertook extensive research to prepare these documentaries including contacting a wide range of authors and experts. While it covers a controversial subject it is well grounded in fact.

My only misgiving is that with such an interesting and complex series each episode is only

around 50 minutes; it would have nice to have a bit more. That being said, there are extended interviews on the second disc in the package.

Of course, all this is nice, but what about explicit adult content? Well one of the better and more objective documentaries is *Pornorama* (Liberation R1 DVD or Shock DVD R4). Virtually unseen in the States since its production in 1992, *Pornorama* has been rescued from the vaults to offer us the documentary series on DVD for the first time.



Pornorama is an amusing yet insightful documentary into the X-rated adult film industry. Presented by legendary porn star and producer Ron Jeremy and porn star Alexis Devell, it was directed and written by Paul Norman - the man responsible for such truly unusual X-rated films as *Bi & Beyond* and *Edward Penishands*.

Pornorama asks these adult actors the tough questions. What do porn stars do when they're not on set? How did they get into the industry? What do their families think? Jeremy has an amazingly relaxed style, it is perhaps because of his self-deprecating humour and ability to put people at ease he is able to ask quite remarkable questions. For example when interviewing Marcello while a sex scene goes on in the background, Jeremy comments, "That's your girlfriend getting a dick in the old pussy!" looking for a reaction. He confronts people on the toilet and in the most sensitive of positions and asks them lots of probing questions, including about their own sexual identity. A question most seem to avoid answering.

It is also fascinating to note that in 1992 most believed their families did not know what they did for a living as VCR's were not in great demand. I am sure these performers will now find it very different in the age of DVD and internet distribution. It will be a shock to see Mum or Grannie on the internet doing the nasty Eighties style !

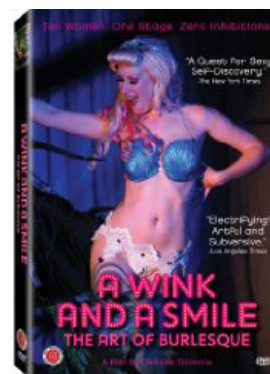
Each episode is 30 minutes and usually involves visiting the sites of a number of films in production. Some discussions are technical such as the significance of pre-filming enema. Poor old Francesca Le, who refuses to use pre-scene enemas, is interrupted a couple of times

when things get a little messy ! While others cover personal lives and relationships.

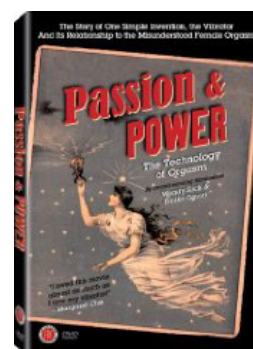
Surprisingly while this is an adult series, it is not especially explicit; it generally avoids showing anything that could be construed as XXX and focuses on the interviews and discussions. Most of the shots cut off before penetration but there is a lot of nudity, so look forward to seeing such classic porn stars as Samantha Strong, Chantilly Lace, Brittany O'Connell, Shayla LeVeaux, and Alicia Rio in this entertaining as well as informative series.

While *Pornorama* may explore sexuality from the perspective of the professional, what about the average man or woman ?

A very insightful doco in this regards is *A Wink and A Smile* (First Run Pictures 2009) which explores the world of Burlesque from within the context of ten ordinary women who simply want to express themselves in a new way. Each decides to step outside their comfort zone and explore the world of Burlesque. It is fascinating to see how a doctor, student, homemaker, even a taxidermist explore eroticism, dancing and striptease while keeping control of their own sexuality and lives.



On a more intimate note, *Passion and Power: The Technology of Orgasm* (First Run R1 and Hopscotch R4) explores the role of the vibrator within women's sexuality with lots of significant social observations along the way. This documentary traces the vibrator through history, around two and a half thousand years. Hippocrates may have been the inventor, using it as a hysteria treatment. Hysteria according to him was caused by the revolt of the uterus against neglect, so it needed some attention.



It was widely believed for many centuries that female orgasm was necessary for conception. By Victorian times this had changed, and women's bodies were tightly contained to prevent



The Oster Massage Stim-U-Lax

“leakages”. There were doubts raised that women even had orgasms. If women suffered from hysteria, physicians could bring them to a “hysterical paroxysm” by genital massage. This hysteria could be caused by such novel medical conditions as reading French novels while wearing a tight corset.

Women soon woke up to this and started looking for other methods of satisfaction. The douche apparatus was widely recommended by such notables as John Harvey Kellogg. Water-based methods were slow and labour-intensive, so mechanical vibrators soon appeared, marketed as medical appliances. They were not exactly compact – the Chattanooga vibrator stood nearly five feet tall.

The ready availability of electric power in the home and the reduction in size of electric motors made smaller personal vibrators practical at last. It is noted that the electric vibrator actually preceded the electric iron and vacuum cleaner by nearly ten years, so we know what women would rather be doing. The box for the Andis vibrator has a picture of a lady apparently waiting for the vibrator while her husband uses it to stimulate his scalp.

About this point the vibrator went underground and ads disappeared from the magazines. It wasn't until the 1970s that it resurfaced, this time unashamedly used as a masturbation aid. Women had discovered their own sexuality and kept it under their own control. The “medical” camouflage disappeared and has stayed buried ever since.

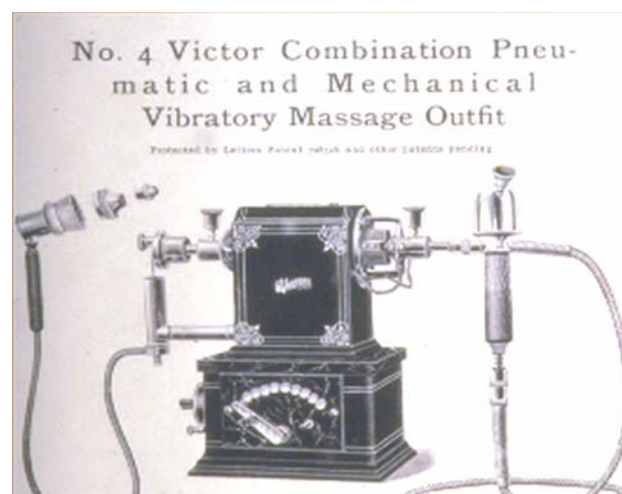
Not so the legal side. At least five U.S. states still have legislation on the books restricting the sale, ownership or right to sell vibrators. Despite the best efforts of the Women's movement peo-

ple can still be charged for owning a device which can stimulate a woman's genitals, and the film gives one such case. Civil liberties are set aside in such states and strangely the Women's Libbers do not seem to have taken up the cause. This latter half of the film is far more disturbing than the lighter note taken earlier. There are still people out there who feel they have a right to impose their morality on others.

The Extras are as good as the main story. Rachel Maines shows us some early (and really scary) vibrators from her collection, “Dancing Vibrators” is hilarious, and there are various still galleries.

Discussion of women and eroticism always brings up the issue feminism and porn. While there are lots of “shock and horror documentaries” most of these are ideologically driven, whether by extreme feminists or fundamentalists. The reality is that there will always be excesses in any industry and that legislation is the solution rather than suppression. One could easily take the argument to an extreme position and argue that since there are lots of cases of food poisoning in restaurants, all restaurants should be closed or that since large numbers of patients die from medical negligence, all doctors should be deregistered and stopped from practising.

Extreme positions do not work in the real world and while limits need to be placed to protect “erotic actors” (and that is what they are) from abuse and exploitation, beyond this it is the market that should decide what sells and what doesn't. Issues regarding consent are obvious and apply in all forms of cinema and adult cinema should not be seen as any different. If you



Mechanical Vibratory Massage Outfit

have any doubts, watch *Pornorama* and you clearly see these are performers playing a role; no more, no less.

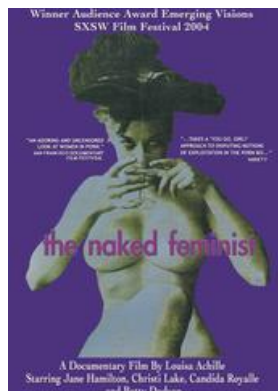
There are a number of impressive feminist documentaries examining erotica from a woman's perspective. *The Naked Feminist* by Louisa Achille is a superb example. It is a fascinating and informative exploration of the world of adult entertainment from the perspective of the many woman artists, performers and directors involved. It is great to see a film handle such a controversial yet significant subject in a professional, intelligent and yet at the same time amusing and entertaining manner.

The central thesis of *The Naked Feminist* is that while individuals may be exploited in the sex industry (as in any other business). There are also many empowered women who take charge of their own sexuality and makes her own career choices. This is an unusual documentary in that it really offers a counter-balance to the extreme puritanism that is found hiding under the cloak of so many feminist commentaries on adult materials.

The Naked Feminist offers interviews with major figures including a good overview of the development of female operators of adult video companies and adult material made by woman including Club 90. Club 90 developed primarily from a group of adult woman performers and from this nexus developed such ground breaking work as the sex performance art of Annie Sprinkle and the Femme products by Candida Royalle which are sex positive erotica for couples.

This is an intelligent documentary which offers a solid balance of interviews including insightful discussion with a wide range of adult performers, recent and older and various academic and commentators.

The Naked Feminist is not a "gloss" job, it discusses honestly the misogyny of some aspects of the adult industry especially Gonzo films and the prevalence of lowest common denominator porn, but also argues that in a truly free society we must allow freedom of speech to control the market as long as no one is directly coerced or



harmed. *The Naked Feminist* does give some coverage to "traditional" feminist critiques of pornography, but to be honest these were not especially convincing. While they argue they were not against "nudity" only exploitation, there was a sense these were people "out of time" arguing a very Victorian view of relationships without any real honest re-appraisal of the modern experience of human sexuality.

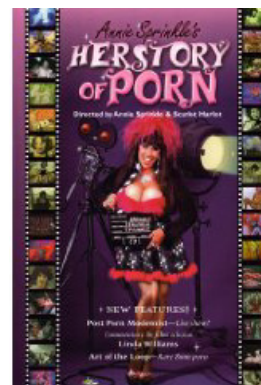
The Naked Feminist is a superior documentary offering a good overview of the adult movie industry from the perspective of the empowered female. I felt that one of the most sensible observations in the whole film was so simple yet so imperative - "the answer to bad pornography is good pornography!".

The Naked Feminist argues, rightly so, that woman (indeed everyone male, female, gay, straight and whatever !) must reclaim their sexuality and if they do not like what they see depicted on film, they should make it themselves.

Web: <http://www.myspace.com/nakedfeminist>

Annie Sprinkle is interviewed within *The Naked Feminist* and has had a significant role in both the history of XXX cinema and reclaiming women's power within the field.

An interesting film is *Annie Sprinkle's Herstory of Porn* (Joseph Kramer Productions R1 DVD 2008) which offers a bird's eye view of Sprinkle's career, she had made over 150 adult films so there is a lot to choose from.



The selection includes everything from her early hippie porn to her art films, transsexual films and docos. This is very comprehensive and her commentary is informed and intelligent. There is also a commentary by film scholar Linda Williams from UC Berkeley, and the author of the book "Hard Core".

These are just a small selection of documentaries on issues relating to sex, adult cinema and censorship. It is a field well worth exploring and the more informed we become about freedom of expression the more power we have to demand our rights to watch what we may choose in the privacy of our own homes.



Reflections on The Dark Side of Porn Channel 4 Series

When I went looking for documentaries on adult entertainment, one of the most comprehensive series available was (and is) nine shows from Channel 4 in the U.K. With a title such as *The Dark Side of Porn* I was not immediately captivated, and as a civil libertarian with a strong commitment to freedom of expression I was perturbed by the marketing and hype. However, I decided to give it a chance and was surprised to find it a comprehensive, challenging and relatively objective experience. Sure, it is fair to say that there is a certain “tone” that creeps in every so often which is somewhat condescending if not moralist and the series as a whole does seem “uneven” in its presentation, but for sheer breadth of coverage it is worth watching.

The series opens with *Porn Shutdown* which primarily examines HIV/AIDS issues and Gonzo porn. I do find this a very strange way to open a series on adult entertainment. I would have thought that a history of erotica, even a discussion of what erotica/adult cinema/pornography means would have been of more value. There is not even an overview of the “current state of the industry” but a very specific focus on health and safety issues relating to HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS

testing and condom use. While this is a very important issue, I am not sure why a series should start at this point. The other section on Gonzo porn is confronting and certainly a shocker. We are introduced to the infamous filmmakers Max Hardcore and Bob Black and their extreme porn creations which are obsessed with double penetration, degradation and lots of bodily fluids. Again I have some misgivings; these filmmakers are at the very edge of adult entertainment and are certainly not representative. While it is important to give coverage to “extremes” I would have thought a more general discussion of mainstream adult cinema would have served the viewer better.

Many of the issues covered in this first episode tie in with issues covered in the third episode *Debbie Does Dallas Uncovered*. *Debbie Does Dallas* was the major porn success story of the Seventies and in this episode the film is revisited and the stars interviewed. The emphasis is on giving the background on the film including mafia funding, drug problems, court cases and the disappearance of the lead star Bambi Woods. Along the way we are introduced to cops on campaigns against porn, criminal investigations and jaded pornstars bemoaning their lot.



Scene from *Diary of a Porn Virgin*



Star of *Debbie Does Dallas* Bambi Woods



Home made Amateur Porn

Together these two episodes bring up a number of issues about adult cinema which are significant but not really addressed in any great depth in the series. If one is objective about concerns about health and safety, drug use, work conditions, crime connections and so on then the way forward is the mainstreaming of adult entertainment. This has already happened to a large extent since the Seventies but needs to continue at a faster pace. If the adult industry is considered like any other form of industry then standard conditions of work can be encouraged, if not enforced. It is only when we remove the pernicious influence of religious and moral extremists that authentic protection can be offered to adult performers.

The second episode *Diary of a Porn Virgin* and the Fourth Episode *Death of a Porn Star* explore the mechanics of adult cinema and psychological issues. *Diary of a Porn Virgin* is significant as it shows what it is like to make porn films; two very different women (and a group of blokes) document their attempt to enter the porn industry. While it isn't glamorous, it is what is to be expected; good money for physically demanding hard work. *Death of a Porn Star* is somewhat more sensationalist and ties together themes from the third episode on *Debbie Does Dallas*. Focusing on celebrity sex star Lolo Ferrari it examines everything from plastic surgery addiction to the cult of celebrity. Ferrari who had the biggest tits in the industry is dissected with psychological profiles and a critical eye on everyone from her mother to her husband. While interesting and reflecting on the dangers of low self-esteem, I am not convinced it really has much to do with what we would define as erotica except in a roundabout manner. She only ever made one porn film (while scenes from it were edited into around ten) and spent most of her days as a celebrity model.

The truth is that adult cinema is physically and psychologically demanding and accordingly



Lolo Ferrari

there will always be casualties. These episodes debate these issues and ask how they should be dealt with and where the responsibility lies.

In many ways I would compare adult performers with sports men and women. They are well paid, but the job is physically demanding. There is an ongoing risk of injury and health problems and the psychological effect of the constant physical nature of the job is great. If the performer achieves a high level of success there is also the dangers of fame and publicity and all the madness of obsessive fans. Since sex work is still a controversial area due to both religious and social customs, the risk to the porn star is perhaps greater than for the sports person.

The question which must be asked, however, is what responsibility can really be demanded from a producer or studio? While we may agree for minimum health and safety standards, good pay, a constructive environment and a fair go, I do not think it is sensible to ask producers to act like counsellors or parents. This is an industry making money not a welfare agency or a family and to even suggest that some sort of "nanny" state protection or paternalism should exist to protect "actors or performers" from themselves is ridiculous.

There seems to be an ongoing discussion of "low self-esteem" throughout the episodes of this series but doesn't that apply in any industry? Don't sportsmen push themselves to be better for similar reasons, obsessive academics, racing car drivers. The list could go on. Perhaps low self-esteem drives mad religious loonies and we should protect the world from the "Ted Haggarts" who deny their sexuality and create hatred. I would certainly suggest that more people die from religious extremism than from making skin flicks.

We live in a society where people have all sorts of motivations and it seems disingenuous to suggest we should have a protective nanny industry for porn while other industries (the banks come to mind) run rampant. Health and safety is one thing, but suppressive protectionism is another. In many ways the discussions on economics, health and psychology in porn are misdirected since these issues are really larger than one single industry. If we look at the major source of adult product, the United States, these issues concern all aspects of the free market economy.

America is not known for its generosity for the unemployed or poor and indeed even a modicum of universal healthcare is still being fought over under the Obama administration. If we look at recent events with investment banking then issues regarding economic regulation and the rights of workers and investors apply across the board and to focus in on one industry smacks of media distortion.

The various concerns about the porn industry expressed should really be seen as concerns within a greater economy which has major problems. While as a libertarian I am all for economic and social freedom with minimum government regulation, at the same time I would not wish to see individuals "used and spat out" but this is a problem with an out of control free market economy not with adult entertainment. Many would argue that more general protections for workers are the answer not moral platitudes or industry specific legislation. If you really want to protect people from "exploitation" then better education, better social support, better resources, better laws (anti-discrimination) are the answer.

Digging below the surface it looks to me like those who dislike porn are actually simply using another mechanism as a form of censorship. While economic and larger issues are significant ultimately the individual is responsible for their own behaviour and has the right to make their

own decisions, good or bad; that is what freedom means in a democracy.

The next episode (which actually began session two) is *Amateur Porn*. This examines the phenomenon of amateur porn which is now flourishing due to the development of fast internet services worldwide. It also examines the pitfalls of an industry which essentially works unregulated and from private homes. The focus is primarily on two filmmakers, a woman who makes amateur porn with unpaid men and paid female performers and a male filmmaker who seems to exploit his partners, lovers and others to create homemade DVD titles.

Session Two Episode Two is *Me and My Slaves* and explores the work of BDSM through the eyes of Rick who has worked in the field for some 25 years. It is a strange documentary which explores the difficult life of a traumatized gay man who has worked as an S & M Master. Rick is a bundle of contradictions, a committed Christian, a gay sadist and a wounded soul, his story while both engaging and moving has more to do with sex work than with adult film and really does not fit well within the series. It is example of how uneven the *Dark Side of Porn* really is. Looking objectively it does seem that Channel 4 has simply strung together a sequence of docos from various sources to make a series. This means that its coverage of some areas are patchy, others overemphasized and at other times it seems to meander off into a tangent and leaves you wondering what the hell the subject at hand has to do with adult or erotic entertainment.

Hunting Emmanuelle documents the unique phenomena of the Emmanuelle films. Emmanuelle broken new ground creating a tale based on the liberated woman who controls her own sexuality rather than being a plaything for men.



Heavy bondage, discipline and Leather



Emmanuelle

Sylvia Kristel became an instant star in the first two films and was propelled to fame. However, the film also triggered massive controversies within both the women's movement and in the world of cinema as a whole. The film explores the world of the series with interviews with the director, producer and staff as well as rare interviews with Sylvia Kristel herself. It is also intriguing to trace the slow movement from the original Euro eroticism of the series through to the hard-core Emmanuelle films of today.

The final episodes of *Does Snuff Exist* and *The Real Animal Farm* explore some of the most explosive questions relating to adult cinema. The issue of Snuff is a real debate. While certainly there have always been cases where criminals will kidnap, torture and kill and record the event for their own pleasure, there is little evidence that such a practise is done for distribution or sale. Most criminologists argue that such recordings are for the private re-enactment of the crime and hence do not really fit into the general understanding of snuff cinema. The subject has been exhaustively researched by many writers and it is generally found that supposed snuff films are either faux documentaries (Mondo) films which are collections of news footage mixed with fake footage or "realistic" horror films made with special effects. Most trace the origin of the Snuff legend to rumours of the Manson family making murder sex films which led to an innovative filmmaker creating a film called *Snuff*.

This created an urban legend which took hold in the public imagination. One of the most infa-

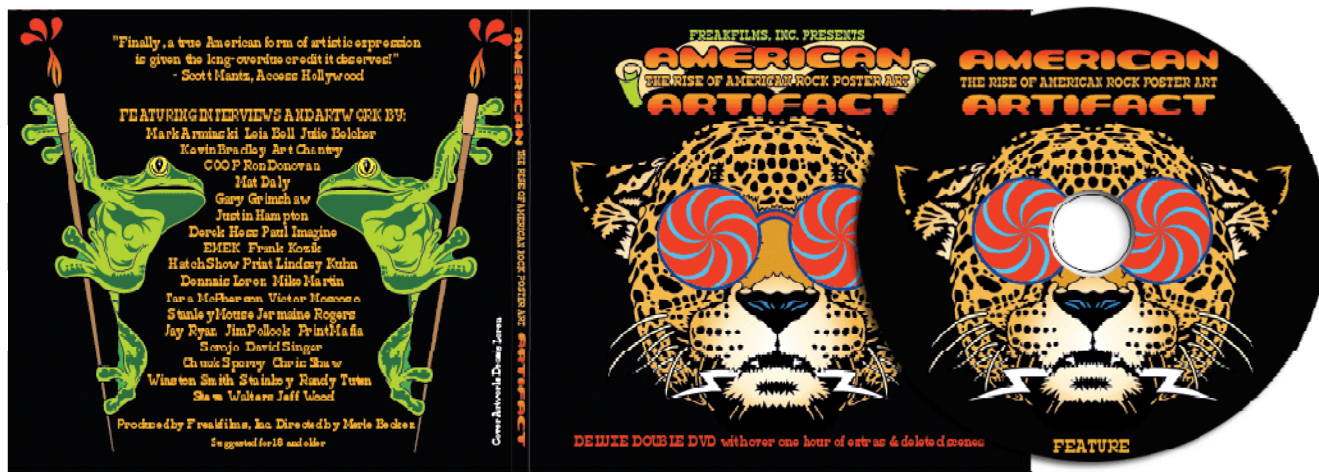
mous examples was *Faces of Death*, banned for years and when the producer was interviewed he was able to prove categorically that most of the footage was faked. This is not to downplay the psychopathology of those who torture, kill and record their crimes for their own fantasies, but there is a vast difference between individual criminal activity and a supposed "Snuff industry".

The Real Animal Farm explores the story behind bestiality in porn films. It is well researched and interviews those involved in making one of the most infamous animal sex films. Again while interesting the vast majority of adult filmmakers view such films as "beyond the pale" and it is not in any way representative of general adult cinema. What both the *Does Snuff Exist* and *The Real Animal Farm* episodes bring into view are issues of consent and these apply across all industries. Just as we do not want children, the mentally incompetent, the mentally ill or animals exploited so in the adult movie industry issues regarding the age of consent, what are acceptable limits and so on are viable discussions. Clearly consensual BDSM is fine, abuse and violence is not, an age of consent must be rigorously enforced and since animals cannot consent, bestiality would be considered a non-starter.

The Real Animal Farm tells the story of Bodil Joensen, a clearly unstable young woman whose brief notoriety as the 'Queen of Bestiality' was followed by a downward spiral of alcohol abuse and prostitution before her death of cirrhosis of the liver at the age of forty.

The *Dark Side of Porn* is certainly an extensive look at the boundaries of adult entertainment. My problem with the series, however, is that it is not truly representative of the subject. I would have liked to see it called the "Untold Story of Porn" and offer a wider and more comprehensive view of the subject. I was surprised to find no coverage of the history of erotica, the state of the modern industry or, more significantly, debates on censorship, freedom of expression and pro and anti porn perspectives.

While there is incidental discussion of issues such as feminism and religion there is little real debate on the controversy that surrounds adult entertainment. While this series is certainly challenging, entertaining and informative, ultimately I do believe it is not as comprehensive as it could be.



American Artifact Deluxe Double DVD All Region NTSC

American Artifact chronicles the rise of American rock poster art since its birth in the 1960s. While it could be argued the medium took its inspiration from earlier posters for such diverse events as boxing and wrestling matches.

Director Merle Becker took a cross country journey to interview rock poster artists from the different eras to chart the development of the American Rock Poster. The film explores the history of the rock poster movement in America from its earliest forms in the Sixties, through Punk and Grunge to the development of the rock poster art scene today where it is treated as work of independent art.

The 1960s in San Francisco was a happening place. With the birth of the dance concert, a

rock poster was created to advertise most shows and these quickly became visual treated. People began pulling them of the telephone poles, almost as quickly as they were put up, and promoters such as Bill Graham started to give them out at the end of his shows to advertise the next week's show. Marked by outrageous colours and psychedelic content, these posters have ended up being some of the most collectible of all.

As the Sixties died and traditional rock moved into the large stadium and some would argue, a too commercial vein, Punk rock became an amazing source for the rock poster. In most cases these were actually "flyers" done for bands on Xerox machines in local libraries, or at photocopy stores such as Kinkos.

They were glued to buildings and phone poles surreptitiously at night by kids in the scene. In this pre-computer era, the flyers were not only an important form of communication but created by with scissors, glue, newspapers and whatever was at hand.

With the evolution of such sites as GigPosters.com and poster shows the rock poster has experienced a renaissance and become one of the more significant indie art forms of choice. Artists like EMEK, Tara McPherson, and Jay Ryan are creating beautiful works of art for a wide and diverse range of contemporary groups from the well-known to the obscure.

This is an extremely comprehensive film, interweaving intensive interviews with over thirty artists with images of an incredible range of works.

It is well crafted offering an excellent balance of interviews, art and commentary to create a truly captivating documentary.



Poster made for the film
EMEK, Justin Hampton, Jermaine Rogers

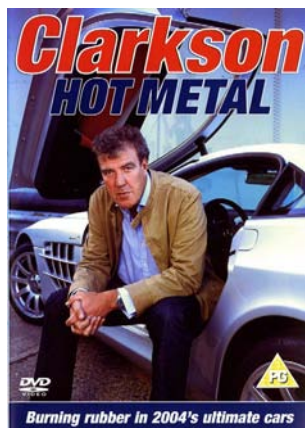
The DVD featured interviews with Stanley Mouse, Frank Kozik, Art Chantry, EMEK, CO-OP, Derek Hess, Mark Arminski, Tara McPherson, Justin Hampton, Victor Moscoso, Jermaine Rogers, Jay Ryan, Chuck Sperry, Ron Donovan, Lindsey Kuhn, Leia Bell, Jim Pollock, Randy Tuten, Jim Sherraden & Hatch Show Print, Scrojo, Winston Smith, Print Mafia, Paul Imagine, Kevin Bradley, Julie Belcher, Jeff Wood, Steve Walters, Mat Daly, Stainboy, David Singer, Dennis Loren, Mike Martin, Gary Grimshaw, and Chris Shaw.

If that is not enough, the second disc includes extensive deleted scenes and extras. These include extended interviews, How to Silkscreen, Artists Q & A and lots more.

Web: <http://www.americanartifactmovie.com/>

Clarkson-Hot Metal
BBC
Roadshow
Entertainment.
R4 DVD

Jeremy Clarkson, co-host of top TV show Top Gear, has a theory. He thinks the world is slowing down. Not the planet as such but the modes of transport we use to travel it.



He provides convincing evidence – the world's fastest aeroplane, the American Blackbird spy plane, dates back to the 70s and 80s. The fastest passenger plane, the Concorde, is similarly dated and has now been withdrawn from service. Does this apply to cars as well?

He thinks it does. In a series of tests he lines up



Ford GT 40



Zonda Vs. Jaguar

the cream of today's fast cars against their twenty year old ancestors and puts them to the test. In spite of the weight reduction brought about by the use of carbon fibre or aluminium, the results are surprising – in most cases the old cars ARE faster. The tests include the Paganì Zonda taking on the older Jaguar XJ220, and a whole set of the Datsun / Nissan Z series. A MacLaren Mercedes SLR is pitted against a Porsche Carrera.

The trend of the old being faster than the new continues, so Jeremy looks at what improvements have been made in the ensuing years. Handling? Looks? Engine noise? The results are again interesting. It's also a great excuse to drive very fast and wear out lots of rubber. This is Jeremy Clarkson, after all. He asks the question "Is motoring as much fun as it was?". Judging by the tyre smoke, yes, it is.

Even recycling the older cars is more fun. We see the classic segment from Top Gear where elderly cars are fired off a cliff edge and Jeremy shoots them with everything from a shotgun to a Carl Gustav anti-tank rocket. It's much more fun than draining their fluids and crushing them.

So, in the end, we come to the fastest car. Will it be the new Ford GT or its ancestor, the old GT40? You will have to buy the DVD to find out.



Datsun Z

**Human Weapon
Season One
History Channel
ABCTV
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

This documentary series is an interesting look at the forms of martial arts practiced around the world. Many of these fighting forms were devised as a response to oppressive governments who attempted to disarm the population or as a means of self defence in troubled times. The series explores the history of the various forms as well as their practices. It does not glorify the violent aspects but explains their context in the history of the nation and why they were so effective that they have lasted into modern times.

The two presenters are Jason Duff, a Mixed Martial Arts practitioner (an American form of competitive martial arts drawing on many pure forms) and Bill Chambers, a huge ex-footballer and now a wrestler. The episodes take them to many of the best teachers of the various martial arts forms and with their mixture of abilities and professional training they can demonstrate what a particular form is about - the hits, holds, throws and contact points.

Many forms have their own internal divisions which may, for instance, emphasis throws or grappling. At the end of each episode one of the two will face a skilled fighter (and usually get a hiding). In the course of a short full-contact match we can see just how fast and deadly many of the forms are when demonstrated by an expert.



KravMaga

I was surprised at just how many forms of martial arts there were. Sure, everyone has heard of karate, kung fu, and probably Thai kickboxing (the form shown here is Muay Thai).

Many can still remember the less glamorous defence forms of Judo. How many have heard of the traditional Filipino art of Eskrima Stickfighting, or the French streetfighting technique of Savate? Or the Russian Sambo?

As well as the Mixed Martial Arts movement in the United States many organizations have devised their own form, drawing on the earlier styles. We see The Marine Corps Martial Arts, another adaptation that is more combat-oriented, as well as the Israeli army's Krav Maga version. It is unusual to see a man practicing unarmed combat techniques while carrying a gun but the martial arts are just as effective and less dangerous against unarmed opponents

Each style is illustrated by slow-motion moves by the combatants and by CGI animations. The aiming points and the reasons for selecting them are covered, and each part of the series becomes literally a blow-by-blow description of the art. The parts of the body used for the attack are also discussed. Did you know that the elbow is the single hardest part of the body, containing large bones and very little cushioning flesh? If you hit someone with an elbow the hit can carry the full force of your body as well as the extra velocity of swinging from the shoulder.

The extras included in the four-DVD set are a series of Master Fights showing the styles in action and a Master Moves short. This is probably not a series for the kiddies.



MuayThai

James May on The Moon (2009)
BBC
ABC DVD
Roadshow
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Forty years ago James May sat in front of his parents' television watching the first moon landing. It has continued to fascinate him all these years so in this documentary he takes a personal look at the landings and their technology.

The history of the landings is well known so he covers this lightly before talking to three of the surviving men who have set foot on the moon – three of only ten in all.

These men tell their story far better than any history and you get the impression of highly trained men just doing a job. This, however hides the fact that every man was touched in some way by what he had done. The fame and the publicity saw to that and even now their lives are still affected by that one magic moment.

James goes through some of the training that the astronauts had to endure, including the zero-gravity simulator aircraft nicknamed the "Vomit Comet".

It is exhausting and stressful even though it is just a taste of a full training session, and at any point an accident could mean death.

The extra on the DVD is "James May At The Edge Of Space".



U2 in James May on the Moon

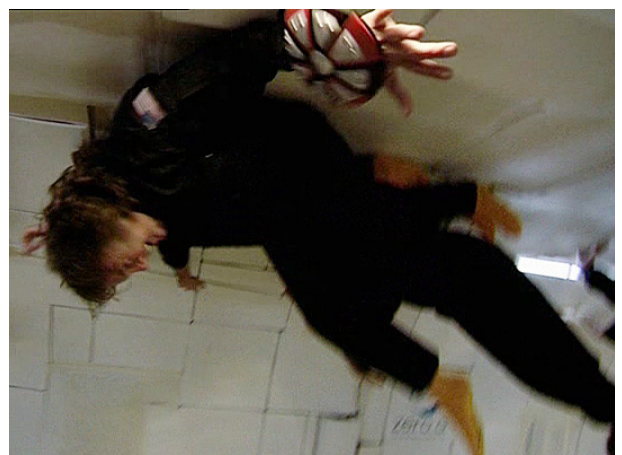
Quite a bit of the early space technology was drawn from the spy flight missions of the then super-secret U2 high altitude reconnaissance aircraft. This aircraft operated on the fringes of space and the pilots had to be equipped with space suits and training far beyond what "normal" aviation required. At 70,000 feet above the Earth you can see the curvature of the horizon and the blackness of space above you.

James undergoes the basic training needed to be a passenger in a U2. It is, frankly, scary, as is the U2 itself. Finally the flight takes him far above the world of commercial aircraft and the effect on him is impressive. This extra is as important as the feature documentary itself.

The film is less than a documentary but more than just a personal impression. James' presentation and understated British humour is just the right combination to deliver a good piece of educational entertainment. If only we could persuade him to lose that hideous purple-and-pink striped shirt.



A view from above



Zero Gravity

**Top Gear Series 11
Metal Tin Edition
2Entertain / BBCTV
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

Yes, they're still going after all these years. Top Gear is one of the world's most popular motoring shows. Their three presenters and their racing driver, The Stig, have become firm favourites in many countries. Why? Perhaps it's because they don't take their job too seriously. After all it would be terribly boring watching people drive hideously ugly, desperately impractical cars at illegal speeds if that's all there was to offer.

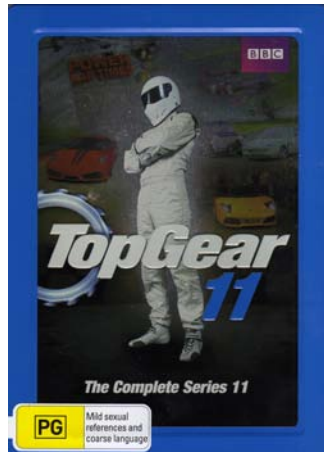
Over the years they have managed to mix a lot of fun into the show. This series features Challenges like is a Nissan GTR faster across Japan than their brilliant public transport system?

Can the British beat the Germans in an automotive rerun of World War II?

Is Jeremy's vintage Mercedes better than James May's vintage Rolls Royce, and can you park either of them in central London?

For a motoring show they are quite irreverent about their sponsors. Jeremy Clarkson, the strongly opinionated one, actually says that a new Alfa is not attractive, and neither is a new Ferrari. People have been telling him for years that supercars are damn ugly so it's wonderful to see him finally admit it.

Even the humble Fiat Panda gets a serve.



British German Challenge

"Are there any mothers here? Yes?"

Well, Fiat has decided that you need patronizing. So they've come up with a limited edition of the Panda....."

"Why is it for mothers?"

"Because it's called the Panda Mammy, and they've given it an orange interior and a purple exterior so it can match your varicose veins"

About the only thing missing is Jeremy's constant cries for "more power!". Possibly that's because after the race across Japan he stayed on for an extra day to test the Nissan GTR on a race track. When he lost the car the spinout was so vigorous that he injured his neck. More power, indeed. You're not as young as you were, Jeremy.

If you're a Top Gear fan you will enjoy this series. If you haven't seen it before, give it a try and see how much fun you can have on four wheels (or three wheels in one episode).

The series comes beautifully presented in a tin box with The Stig on the cover. It's a collector's piece in its own right, as well as being a memento of a really entertaining TV show.



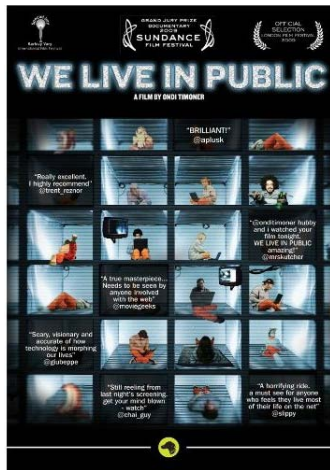
In Tokyo



Ugly Car

We Live in Public Dogwoof Pictures R2

Too often films on the Internet and technology only come in two flavours. There are the doom-sayers who constantly warn us of the internet sex predators, addiction to computer games and cyber-crime and the internet prophets who sell us a bright new world where all of mankind will be linked in a glowing web of collective Bliss.



We Live in Public offers a surprisingly nuanced view of the development of the world of the Web through the life of Josh Harris. Harris is not someone who automatically comes to mind when you talk about the big wheelers and dealers of the computer world. He is not a Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, yet in the 1980's he was a pioneer of online networks.

Before the internet even became popular, Harris had formed Jupiter Communications which produced reports on new and developing technology and created chat rooms for Prodigy, which he later sold back to them for a tidy profit. As the internet took off and dot.com businesses became the flavour of the day, Harris became one of the "nerd gods" of the period founding Pseudo.com.

Pseudo was the first internet TV network, it offered live TV channels combined with interactive chat rooms. The problem, however, was that it was way before it's time, a difficulty Harris would have over and over again. Pseudo was offering live TV in a period before broadband and hence the transmission was painfully slow and while it was a great idea the bandwidth required to make it work was just not there.



As we explore the exciting world of Pseudo, Harris also offers interesting insights into the effects of television and then the internet on our lives. He notes how the children of the Sixties and Seventies, including himself, found their families in television rather than home life and

hence the virtual world of entertainment was more real to them than the physical one. This experience was later transferred to the internet where socializing is done via social networks and online personas or avatars are the masks of choice.

Harris, however, always innovative, deciding to take his "avatar" a little further and developed Luvvy, a strange and disquieting clown persona which he began to use to entertain his friends. Soon it became an obsession and he wore his "clown drag" to business meetings and in public. This obviously did not go down well with the business world and media and he left Pseudo in 1999.

His next project *Quiet: We Live in Public* was even more controversial. In the centre of Manhattan he created an underground bunker to house a "Big Brother" like experiment in the form of the Quiet colony. Some eighty people were housed in pods and offered everything they would need; food, entertainment, a shooting range, alcohol and a dance club. At the same time every aspect of their life would be filmed and documented. They would literally eat, drink, have sex and go to the toilet in public and would have to agree not to leave the underground community. To up the ante he hired psychiatrists to interrogate the inhabitants of the colony on every aspect of their private lives. These interrogations became more and more invasive and what at first seemed like a media experiment seemed to be spiralling out of control.

The experiment moved from Anarchy to violence and freedom began to turn to aggression. Many felt it was becoming too much like a strange cult and early in 2000 the police raided believing it was some sort of doomsday sect connected to the end of the millennium. Many believed the raid was just in time before many of the occupants would end up permanently





Pods in the Quiet Colony

psychologically damaged. Others heralded it as major media and radical lifestyle experience. The answer is probably somewhere in-between. Harris was certainly making a name for himself.

Following Quiet, he went away on holiday, fell in love with Tanya and developed his first (and only) intimate relationship. Together they embarked on the next “Live in Public” experiment. They moved in together and turned their whole lives into an internet experience. Cameras and microphones were placed throughout their unit and filmed every aspect of their lives, feedback constantly streamed in via chat rooms set up for the purpose on their website. While it went well for the first few months slowly their relationship disintegrated under the pressure of living in the public light. Tanya left and when the dot.com crash took caused a 55% fall in the tech market the project collapsed leaving Josh with little to no cash.

In 2003 he was running an apple farm having lost his fortune and having no meaningful relationships, having isolated himself from both family and friends. He communicated via video tape and lived with his animals and apples. Strangely Harris seems to be a person who has little connection with reality having grown up in his own virtual world, in the form of both television and the internet. He has rewritten his life the way he wants to see it including redefining his relation-



Josh Harris as Luvvy

ship with Tanya as a pseudo-relationship for “Live in Public” experiment only.

Of course Harris couldn’t keep himself out of the world of technology for long and in 2005 he sold his farm and opened Operator 11. Operator 11 was a unique internet based site in which a user could “create their own television show”; it was creative and innovative but once again way before its time. When Harris tried to get investment no one wanted to touch him due to his past media “experiments” and none of the current crop of media moguls wanted in, it crashed into a heap.

In 2008 Harris resurfaces in Ethiopia working with Orphans and coincidentally escaping his creditors. While he may have chosen humans over technology for now, considering his career so far one may wonder whether this is just another stage in his strange media managed life.

Josh Harris seems to have a unique problem. He is always ahead of the trend, way ahead. The ramifications of each trend are insignificant in Harris’ eyes, he knows they are coming and simply explores them in his own unique, some would say, bizarre way.

The impressive aspect of this documentary is that it doesn’t pontificate; it provides insight into the many aspects of the effects of media and the internet on our lives through the lens of the business experiments of Josh Harris. We Live in Public is a challenging and thought provoking documentary. It avoids sensationalism, even though covering some truly wild and outrageous territory. It will stimulate much debate about all manner of subjects from the effects of media to privacy, celebrity and fame to the personal cost of a life lived in the spotlight.

ASTONE® MEDIA GEAR AP-110D



Continuing our series on Media Centres, Synergy has been pleased to find an Australian firm producing a product which really stands out in the market.

Astone is an Australian firm that specialises in developing innovative entertainment products for the Asia Pacific market. Its primary focus is on such products as Digital Entertainment, Audio, Lifestyle and Home Appliances, Computer Peripherals, Electronic and Communication. What immediately becomes apparent when you look at their range is that they offer items which are technologically more advanced than many on the market and yet at a price substantially lower than their competitors.

While they have a range of media centers, we found the Astone Media Gear AP-110D to be the perfect addition to a home network. The first thing you immediately notice is its 1080p compatibility through HDMI which means you get the optimal picture quality for your TV. The unit is compact with two USB connections on the front, Ethernet can be connected from the back and wireless via the optional Astone AW-N290 USB 802.11n wireless Dongle. It looks nice and has a stylish presentation, its full metallic case provides protection from overheating and also reduce electro-magnetic interference, important since you will have USB storage attached to it.

Setting up the unit is incredibly simple; plug it in, connect your cables and link to your storage. The set up menu is an easy to navigate drop down affair which allows you to set up your video (for HDMI we recommend simply using HDMI Auto), audio, net (wired or wireless) and so on. The units support Network Attached Storage via a built-in Samba Server, which is able to share the device to the network.

After simple configuration you are ready to access your media and this is where the unit comes into its own. As soon as you click on USB it scans your storage device and presents you with a menu. There are no unnecessary bells and whistles just a very simple and easy to use interface. When you hover over a file it plays the movie so you can see a preview be-



fore it starts, you can also use a filter to choose photos, audio, movies or all media content.

One of the things I especially like is the ability to control the files on your devices. Since a lot of larger USB attached storage devices are powered the last thing you want to do is have to move it back and forward to your computer.

The Astone Media Gear AP-110D allows you to move, rename and delete files so you can manage the media files on your devices. You can also move files from one device to another so you can use a USB flash drive and copy your files onto your storage device. Of course you can also do this via your wired or wireless network but depending on your connection, the speed will vary.

The quality of the output from the AP-110D is impressive. It decodes in High Definition 1080p and offers very fluid playback, it also supports subtitles and you can change subtitle display by remote control. There is a zoom out/in, pan the picture, fast forward, fast reverse and slow-motion.

It will play all major movie formats and most minor ones as well. These include MPEG-1 (DAT / MPG / MPEG); MPEG-2 (MPG / MPEG / VOB / ISO / IFO / TS / TP) MPEG-4 (MP4 / AVI / MOV); DivX 3/4/5/6, Xvid (AVI / MKV) H.264 AVC (TS / AVI / MKV / MOV) VC-1 (TS / AVI / MKV / WMV); WMV 9 (WMV); Real Video HD 8/9/10 (RM / RMVB) and FLV (FLV).

One of the things you will notice from this list is the minor formats such as Real Video and FLV. We have a test set of around 40 video files in various formats which we run through new equipment, this device was the first to play all of them without a hitch, quite an achievement! It took everything we would throw at it and gave super reproduction in picture and sound.



Photos have not been forgotten either. They display in high definition and the unit supports up to 40 mega-pixel photo files, offers 16 x Zoom in and 3-direction rotation. There is slide show mode with eight kinds of transition effect and you can even add background music ! Formats available are JPG (40-mega pixel without limitation of resolution, Baseline), BMP, PNG, GIF, TIF and TIFF.

The music function is excellent and offers fast forward, fast reverse, repeat, shuffle and shuffle repeat. It can play MP3, M3U (Playlist), WMA, WAV, ASF, AAC, OGG Vorbis, FLAC, iTunes and M4A (AAC).

There is also a DVD function whereby you can add a USB DVD-Rom drive to the system, this works exceptionally well but since it is a USB connection some DMA encoded discs will not play due to commercial restrictions.

The remote is very user friendly, I like the way it has simple colour coded buttons whose functions change depending on what you are doing. Descriptions come up across the top of the screen outlining the current button function and they fulfil the tasks of doing everything from moving files to subtitles. This means the remote is not filled with a myriad of confusing buttons and functions but is easy to control and use.

The wireless ability of the unit is through the Astone AW-N290 is IEEE 802.11 b/g and 802.11n Draft Wireless LAN Dongle. This Pen-size WLAN dongle is small and easy to connect.

It works effortlessly with the Astone Media Gear AP-110D; plug it in, go to the Net settings, put in your password and you are ready to use your network. It complies with IEEE 802.11n Draft and backward compatible with 802.11g and 802.11b. Within 1T2R RF interface, the physical data rate is up to 150Mbps. It also offers excellent Quality of Service technology includes 802.11e and WMM provides you the smooth playback of media while the wireless encryption includes WEP, WPA, TKIP, AES, 802.1x providing you with the security you need.

We have tested many Media Centers (and reviewed a few) but Astone Media Gear AP-110D stands out. It is cost effective and more economical than other units, but does not skimp on build or software quality. It offers more formats in all departments (video, picture and sound) and works effortlessly.

It is marked by a streamlined and simple interface which avoids clutter and gives you immediate access to your media library in an efficient and reliable manner. Its support of USB storage, Network Attached Storage (NAS via Samba), USD DVD-Rom drives, wired and wireless networks makes it the most flexible of units.

We most highly recommend it.

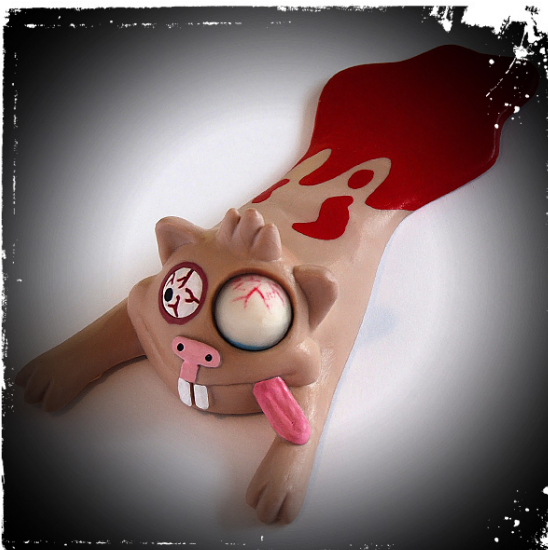
Retail distributors for the unit include: Aus PC-Market Online, EYO, Megaware Computers, MWave, TechBuy, Umart Online, SalesMart, VTech Industries, XPMicro Computer, PC Meal, PCMarket and many others. If you cannot find a distributor in your area contact Astone at <http://www.astone.com.au>



Roadkill hit the market with a bang with their plush toys; squashed, run-over and flattened, they were the ultimate bad taste items. Macabre, perverse but unique. The new addition to their range is made of tougher stuff and comes in the form of a doorstep !

Pop the Weasel is made out of toughened rubber so that his frail but flattened little body can withstand a lifetime of door stopping. Inside the mould of the body is a water-filled sack containing a goggly, bloodshot eye which pops out whenever he's squished under a door.

Pop has splayed arms and a large hindquarter,



his is marked by a realistic look with a tongue that sticks out and two teeth at the front. The door wedge material is a sticky rubber so sits well on any type of floor though carpet seems to be his favourite.

He measures 18 cms from outstretched paw to flattened tail, and 10 cms across from paw to paw. At 300 grams he's a fine figure of a weasel. Although the poor thing is only half the weasel he once was.

He comes nicely presented in superb packaging made from study card in the form of a coffin with a wood design with a skull and cross bones on the front. There are two eyes on the coffin so you can see inside. The coffin is 26 cms long by 15 wide. With a bit of prodding and pounding, it allows just enough space for a run over weasel to be crushed inside. The Death Certificate, Toe Tag, and Bumper Sticker are all contained in a compartment underneath the product. The toe tag is made out of recycled brown card, the Death Certificate is printed on A4 paper, and the Bumper Sticker is printed onto a waterproof sticker.

So if you want to stop your doors from creaking, stop them dead with Roadkill.

Web: <http://www.roadkilltoys.com>



PLASEEBO

"IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK"



Bob Conge is the artist behind Plaseebo. Plaseebo opened in 2005 as an online studio and store selling quite startling items which express his personal vision and includes products which take the medium of vinyl toys to the next level.

Conge is a collector and has always enjoyed making unusual finds. He notes that as a young boy, his most prized possession was a small box in which he kept colourful and uniquely shaped stones, butterfly wings, bird's feet, dried flowers, a skull carved from wood, a small red plastic A-Bomb, and a wave-washed piece of deep blue glass. In college his collecting extended to old toys, American cast iron horse drawn fire wagons, pre-war wind up German tin Litho vehicles, and so on. Later the collections included action figures, vintage Japanese tin robots and space toys and in the 1980's vintage Japanese vinyl Kaiju.

His experience as a collector led him to combine his knowledge of toys with a sense of the artistic. Too often people do not see toys as art. But the truth is that toys can be powerful and imaginative sculptural works expressed in a form different from that which we are used to.

Plaseebo combines Conge's vision as a collector, artist and his personal experience of the world. Each item is hand sculpted and hand painted and is offered in limited editions to assure quality and personal attention to detail.

"The most important creative part of my day is the first 30 minutes in the morning. Almost all of my ideas for new pieces come to me during this period upon waking from sleep and I spend the rest of the day working out how I can bring the

ideas to life. I have no idea where the ideas come from and I do not force or try to direct the process, I just let it happen as if I am listening to the voice of someone else. I make very quick short hand sketches and notes, as some mornings it is fast and furious."

Conge's creative process begins early in the day as he brainstorms his way through all sorts of ideas which come to mind. Sometimes the process is sparked by his concern for what he sees as deplorable human behaviour such as the war in Iraq, which inspired his War figure or his anger over the unfair practices of the banks which resulted in his sculpting the Bank America piece. Other times it may bubble up from his distant childhood memories or fears.

Conge then sifts through the ideas and looks at what can be brought into physical form and slowly his pieces evolve from there. His works exist in a unique dimension between sculpture, toys and art and have a unique presence.

I am become Death ,the shatterer of Worlds
Bhagavad Gita

War (Blood Feud) is a good example of the intersection between current events (The Iraq war) and Bob Conge's artistic style. The figure is a hand cast urethane from an original sculpt. It is 10" high by 6" wide with glass inset eyes. The body and feet of the War figure are made up of the dead bodies of solders, crashed airplanes, blown up tanks and barrels of oil and his legs are the trunks from burned and broken trees. The Dick Cheney smile on the skull is no accident.



While *War* has a strongly political message, others embody environmental and social themes. *The Sum*, for example, and its variations is based on the story of a turtle run over



by a thoughtless driver. Somehow from the personal dump at the back of the driver's home, refuse and forgotten waste transform into a creature bent on revenge. He became known as Sum.

The Sum (P-3) is an Ultra-limited figure hand cast in translucent urethane. It is a one of a kind hand painted piece, Sum measures 9 inches long by 8 inches high by 5 inches wide. The figure has red glass inset eyes and a glow in the dark mouth.

Other figures offer Conge's exploration of history and legend and come with their own complex backstories.

I have always loved ancient Egypt. Since I was a child I was captured by its legends, its architecture and its traditions. The *Legend of Plaseebo* is a marvellously mythic look at this ancient land. Conge has created quite a complex story behind the Plaseebo figure and indeed this became the name he chose for his store. The tale is available on the website and comes with the *Legend of Plaseebo* figures.



Legend of Plaseebo 1st Edition

The 2nd edition *Legend of Plaseebo* figure which is cast in blue glow in the dark vinyl with blue inset eyes is 8" long prone (5" seated) and comes in a 10" long vinyl Sarcophagus. It also comes with a copy of the illustrated Legend of Plaseebo story printed on parchment paper with a lovely full colour header card illustrated by Bob Conge. The edition is limited to 80 pieces worldwide.

The first thing you notice about Bob Conge's work is its fearlessness. He is willing to go where many other artists fear to tread, especially when it comes to vinyl toys. He uses the medium to explore his feelings about current events as well as his own reflections and memories and creates powerful, even cathartic works. While some of his creations are playful and entertaining, others are more confronting and thought provoking.

His subversion of the medium to explore important and significant subjects is unusual. While we have seen lots of vinyl toys which push the boundaries of the artistic medium, Conge takes them further and creates low run items which express his personal experience of the world around him. His creations are beautifully made, visually striking and have a powerful presence.

Web: <http://www.plaseebo.net>

For a very special giveaway see our promotions page.

Sleepy Robot 13

DESIGNER TOYS FROM A POLYMER PERSPECTIVE

Lisastarchild Pinkston lives in Cleveland, OH U.S.A and began creating ceramic figures when she was nine years old. She was encouraged by her mother and began developing her own unique creations. She found plaster limiting and moved into sculpture creating Snowmen and monsters for sale at local craft shows.

Due to the constraints of work she stopped her artistic explorations in 2004 and it was not until 2009 that she once again began to work with clay. She noted the explosion of designer toys and her work is influenced by computer games, Japanese culture and urban vinyl toys. The same year she began to make her own items.

Since the first item she created was called "Sleepy Robot" that became the name of her company. Her online store has become quite popular with a unique range of items hand sculpted out of polymer clay.



Zombie Toast is a quirky and fun little character. He is literally a walking undead slice of toast green in colour with scars and his right arm dragging on the ground. His left arm is outstretched with brains on it. He is nicely made and very attention grabbing.

Bad Brian

Ah, to be a kid again... Destructive and hopped up on sugar!

He doesn't know why he does the things he does (although it could have something to do with the five donuts and three energy drinks he had for breakfast.) Brian is the best candidate for Ritalin we have ever seen!

Each figure comes with different weapon and junk food accessories with are removable. Some of these items include grenade launchers,



katana swords, mini Gatling guns, shotguns and more!

As the figure is blind boxed you will not know what weapon/junk food combination you have received until you open the box.

Bad Brian Stands about 3" high. Each custom "Bad Brian" box is signed and numbered.

Baxter the Glow Bat is a really cute little fella. He is a nice size with a little green heart, black eyes and green ears. He has genetically altered in the Sleepy Robot 13 lab to glow in the dark.



Cupcake Monster Ziek would look cool in your kitchen. He is a realistic looking cupcake topped with sprinkles and a maraschino cherry with a cute little creature. Other cupcake monsters are also available.



Lisastarchild also makes a wide range of little robots which have all sorts of accessories from a Wii to an ipod, they are nicely made, very expressive and each have their own personality. I really love 'em !

Sleepyrobot13

Web: <http://www.sleepyrobot13.etsy.com>



Rampage Toys is run by Jon Malmstedt, whose interest in art has been long standing, even though he has had no formal training. He has a background in miniatures and an eye for clean lines, sharp edges and simple but elegant designs.

Jon began Rampage Toys in 2007 after he received a vinyl toy from his wife and an addiction to this unique art toy genre began; his joy in creating new toys is quite contagious and comes through in everything he makes.

His first major work is *The Cupcake Monster* which is a superb combination of fun and horror. Who does not love monsters and cooks and cupcakes ?

Jon moulded and sculpted seven different characters, all unique in their own right, with a release of only twelve figures in each range.



Each of these strange little creatures have their own stories which are developed and published on the Rampage blog (<http://rampage-toys.blogspot.com>).

Jon advises that plans are currently in the works for a production version of the Cupcake Monster called Cupcake Kaiju.

The toy will be made in the U.S by an injection molding company in New Jersey. The material will be relatively 'soft' plastic, and the toy will be



packaged in the style of a Japanese Kaiju with a hand-made printed header and a bonus sticker.

In the meantime Jon works divides his time between his vinyl and plush ranges and his custom work. (<http://www.rampagetoys.etsy.com>)

To give you some idea of the range of his products I will focus-in on three specific items.

Choco-Chip is a very exciting little fellow. He is one of those rather naughty ankle biting cookie monsters from Rampage series One. He is beautifully made, he was hand-poured into a mould and then hand-painted with spray and acrylic paints. It is not often you see items which are so handmade but of such high quality.

The colour of Choco-Chip really makes him stand out as does the chocolate bits all over his face. He also has cute little spindly legs and nice blue and white shoes. Considering there are only twelve in each run, the fact that they are sold for \$20 US is amazing.

Jelly-O-Plush comes from Rampage series two which is a plush range. He is both very cuddly and cute and is a bit nasty since he has large teeth.

He is beautifully handmade by Jon and his wife and comes in a larger and smaller version.

Rampage also produces some impressive works of print art. A classic example is a Mono-type, printed with oil based etching inks and added to with Acrylics. The work is entitled "Robo Chan Y," and is part of a series of 'Robo Chan' prints that have been long planned but are not yet complete.

This one of a kind print is a good example of Jon's favorite printing technique – stenciling. It results in nice clean edges and bold shapes, without requiring outlines to define the subject

All the products from Rampage are marked by creativity and innovation. They are fun to look at, colourful and intriguing and are marked by superior craftsmanship and production.



There is something very special about hand-made toys, they have a feel and touch not found in mass market items. Each item is just slightly different and the artist is able to have total control of each stage of production. Rampage Toys offers some amazing items which are very reasonable priced and yet sacrifice nothing by the way in quality. I would get in quick if I was you as I do not think their stock will last long!

Rampage Toys

Blog

<http://rampage-toys.blogspot.com>

Etsy Store

<http://www.rampagetoys.etsy.com>

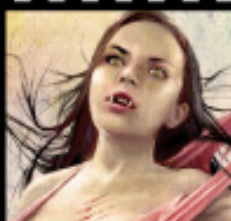
Jon at Rampage has been very nice to Synergy and offered three unique items for us to giveaway. We have a *Choco-Chip*, a *Jelly-O-Plush* and a superb print. Send the word **Rampage** in the subject line with your name and address in the body of the email for a chance to win.

Email: promotions@synergy-magazine.com

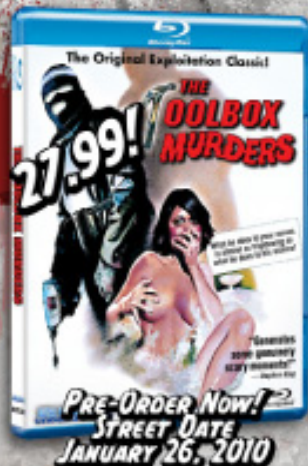
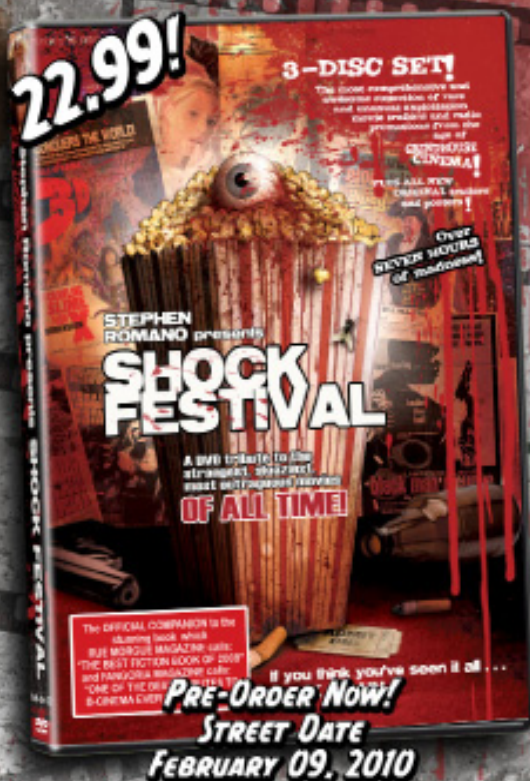
Three winners will be randomly drawn on April 10th and will receive one of these amazing items. Prizes will be sent via registered mail.

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